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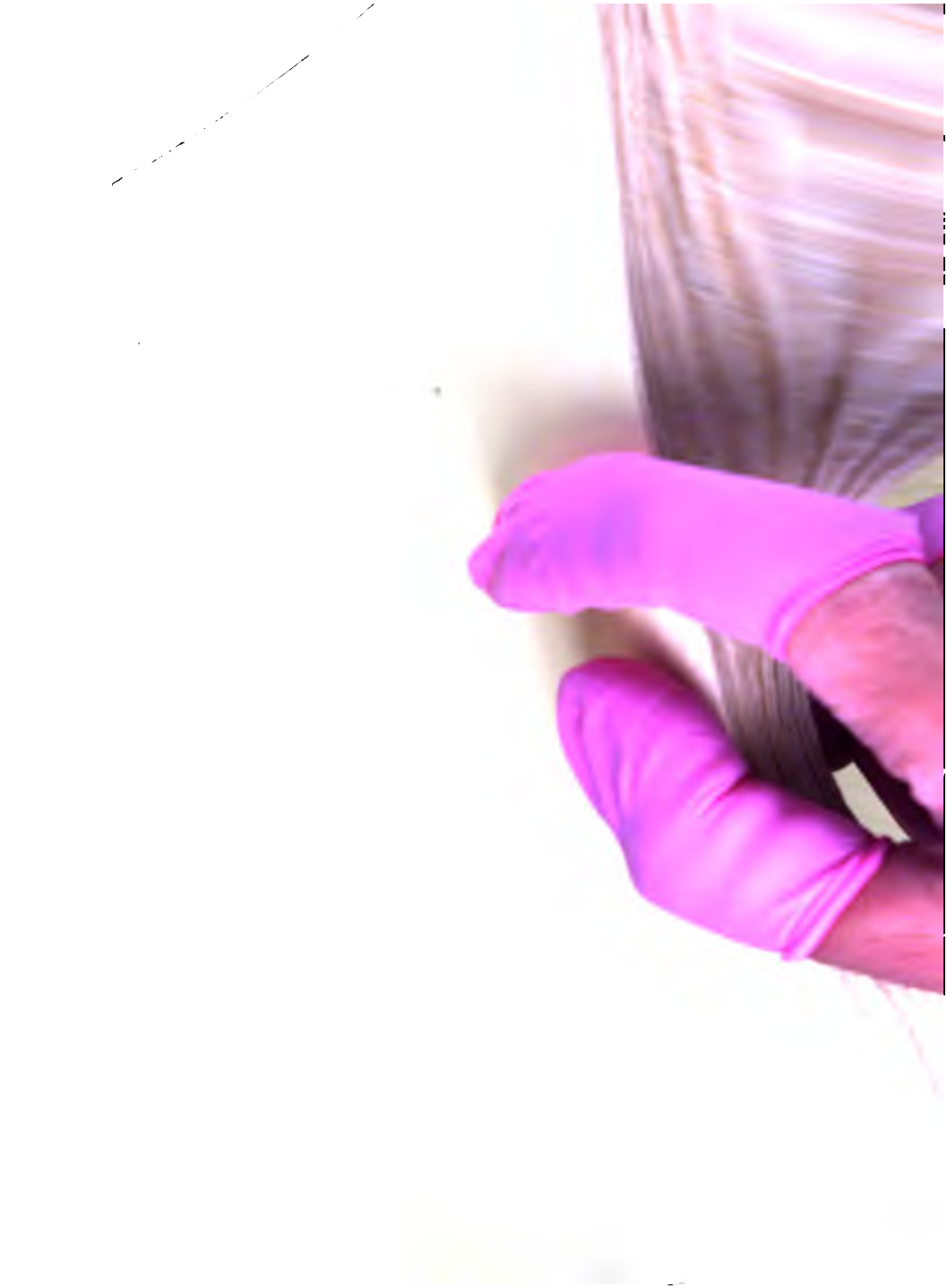

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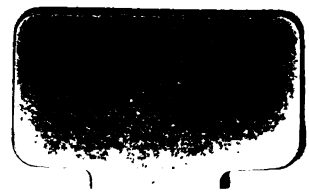


THE MARSTONS.

THE MARSTONS.

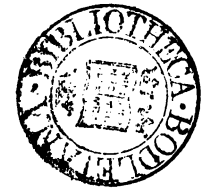
THE MARSTONS.

A Novel.

(REPRINTED FROM FRASER'S MAGAZINE.)

BY

HAMILTON AÏDÉ.



IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TO

THE INMATES OF THAT QUIET HOME

WHERE I STUDIED, FROM THE LIFE,

ONE PORTRAIT IN THESE PAGES,

I DEDICATE THEM

IN LOVING MEMORY OF MANY HAPPY DAYS.

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THE MARSTONS.

CHAPTER I.

STRANGERS IN THE LAND.

Not many miles from London stands a house on the edge of the great river. I will not point to the district more directly: let us call it Fordingham. The express train passing there brings business men to and from London in less than half an hour.

Four years since the house I write of was a moderate-sized villa, whose lilac-bushes and acacias fringed the river's bank for more than five hundred yards. From the water the house showed itself, like a coquettish beauty, by glimpses, behind the half-raised veil of two stately cedars. Between them and the house ran a gravel terrace upon which the windows of the living-rooms opened.

good. He had a strong characteristic face, which some women thought handsome: he was under thirty; and he had the manners of a gentleman. What more could any mother of moderate expectations desire? Therefore, chiefly because there was no Mrs. Marston to push and fight for the interests of her daughter, and because the old man had a well-looking son of eight-and-twenty, the neighbourhood of Fordingham, headed by Mrs. Pomfret, was graciously disposed to extend the hand of friendship to the trio.

But—such is human nature—when it came to be seen that this hand was not seized with the alacrity which was looked for, then the spasm of cordiality increased twofold: there was no measure to the anxiety Fordingham evinced in pressing its hospitality on the new-comers. It might be that Mrs. Marston had not yet been dead two years; it might be that a foreign education indisposed the young lady, at first, for English society (since it came to be known that the family had been long resident abroad). From whatever cause, it was clear that the Marstons were careless of the social advantages Fordingham offered them. One or two sallow-faced men, with dark beards and doubtful linen, occasionally visited the Cedars on Sunday afternoons; and a lively old lady, in a yellow bonnet, had been seen on two occasions at the

window of a fly that was driving in. No one else was ever known to go there.

As to Rupert Marston, like most men who are hard at work all day, he was more inclined, on his return home, to fall asleep over a book by the fire, than to dress himself up to be agreeable to a set of people he didn't know. As yet he had but the most distant, church-door acquaintance with the ladies of Fordingham, and that diurnal railway intercourse with some of its men, of which I have spoken. But there was to be a change to this state of things.

"Mamma," said Kate Pomfret to her mother, one day, "I have a piece of news. You know the old lady whom we have seen in a yellow bonnet, driving into the Cedars? Well, what do you think? I have found out that she is a Miss Pringle, Miss Marston's aunt, and that she is actually come now to live at the Cedars. She arrived yesterday. Fanny Bligh says that Mr. Cassidy called on her mother this morning, in his round of the parish, and that he had just come from the Marstons, where he was introduced to this old Miss Pringle; and he said that she was remarkably talkative, and asked a great many question about the neighbourhood."

"Well," said Mrs. Pomfret, with a slight movement of the head, "perhaps they won't shut them-

selves up any longer in that ridiculous manner now. I must say I think that young man gives himself great airs—not choosing to dine out. Miss Marston, last Sunday, I saw, had left off her mourning. She is certainly a distinguished-looking girl—holds herself so well. I wish you'd had a few more lessons of Madame Michau, when we were at Brighton, Kate; you don't do yourself justice."

"I do so hope Miss Marston will come out now," said Kate, evading the question. "I think she looks so nice, if she would only let us know her."

"Yes, my dear," returned her mother, sighing, "and there are so few here with whom I like you to associate. I wish it, too, particularly on Lionel's account. I am sure, if he had more congenial spirits, he would not be so averse to society as he is. It distresses me very much, for I see it growing on him. He would hardly speak at all, you remember, the last dinner-party we had."

"He gets on very well with men, mamma; and I think," added the young lady, hesitating, "that he doesn't seem shy with those Miss Ropers."

"Don't mention the name of those vulgar girls," said Mrs. Pomfret, quickly. "I am grieved that he should have picked up an acquaintance with em. I can't think, with his refined mind, what

he can see about them;—but the fact is, he is so shy that any bold, forward girl has more chance than a really lady-like, retiring one, with him. Anxious as I am to see him married, I think it would kill me if he were to fall a prey to one of those horrid creatures."

"But, mamma, I don't see why you should be so anxious about Lionel's marrying. He is not so very old. Why, Julian Westbrook is three years older—four-and-thirty, isn't he?—and he is still considered very captivating by every one (but his first cousins), I believe. Of course, *we* don't find him so."

"If I hadn't *always* brought you up to look upon Julian as your brother, I shouldn't allow him to be here now, as much as he is, Kate. But he is not a marrying man; besides, he has been too much spoilt ever to fall very seriously in love; and as he will never have anything more than he has now, it doesn't signify, as it does with Lionel. With him it is a *duty*."

"That is a severe penalty on being an eldest son, mamma—to be dragged to the altar against his will!"

"Not at all. It only settles his position definitely for him, instead of his shilly-shallying half his life. It would be a great weight off your father's mind, and mine, if he were comfortably

and respectably married. Something *must* be done about him this year."

"What can you do, mamma?" said Kate, opening her eyes, and then laughing. "If you drive him to desperation he will be proposing to Miss Roper. Wouldn't Henry do as well, mamma? He will be home on leave next year. It strikes me, by-the-by, that Miss Marston is just the sort of girl he would admire. He likes slight, tall women, you know."

"I hope Henry will not be so foolish as ever to think of admiring any woman who has not a good fortune," said Mrs. Pomfret, in her quick, decisive way. "Second sons can't afford to marry just whenever the fancy seizes them."

"Nor elder sons either, it seems, for the matter of *that*," murmured her daughter, half aside.

"However, there's plenty of time for *him* to think of marrying; and I wish I was as sure of Lionel as I am of poor dear Henry, who runs a risk, really, of being spoilt with all the fuss that is made about his good looks. Lionel's, unluckily, are not a style that the world in general appreciates so much. Your father was saying to me to-day that if Lionel would only find some nice person——"

"You mean if some nice person would find him, mma."

"He would double his allowance, and give him a house in town. But you see, just because he has everything that a young man can possibly want to settle comfortably, he seems to set his face resolutely against it. It is too provoking."

"Mamma," said Kate, presently, looking up, with a smile, "I think you'd better call at the Cedars this afternoon. It would be civil to leave your card upon Miss Pringle."

Mrs. Pomfret rang the bell, and ordered the carriage.

CHAPTER II.

AN ADDITION TO THE FAMILY.

Mr. Marston was an old man of seventy-three, who had never been conspicuous for any great intellectual gifts. And yet his character was a rare one. Faithful, upright, simple; inwardly tender, yet having a horror of all outward emotion; manly in his devotion through life's best years to one object; manly in his resignation, when towards life's close that object was taken from him,—the foundations of the character were hewn out of solid and enduring material. Above this, again, Nature and the habits of threescore years and ten had erected a structure which was certainly original. The clockwork precision wherewith it pleased him that the events of yesterday should be repeated to-day, must have been violated in

any household less quiet, and less devoted to the master's perfect contentment, than that of the Cedars. The humour, which, it was said, his friends had delighted in when he was a young man still smouldered, and sent up sparks now and then, indicating where the fire had been. His ill-disguised delight in the narration of every terrible catastrophe, and every deed of daring, was another amusing trait which had survived youth and middle age. When reading the *Times* to him daily, his daughter often drew upon her imagination for a fuller supply of calamities than that journal afforded. The state of the foreign funds was, indeed, the only other subject of the daily press in which he took a sustained interest. Politics he had long ago done with. But this—the state of Spanish Bonds, Dutch Consols, and the like—it had become the habit of half a lifetime to study. Not that he really cared about money or money-getting—it was just a habit, connected in his mind with the idea of a sound, shrewd, practical sense. That was what he prided himself upon being—a shrewd, practical man. Yet, in point of fact, wherever generosity or warmth of heart came into contact with his boasted prudence, the latter virtue went to the wall. A kinder heart in secret, a warmer friend in time of need, it would be hard to find. But there were no fine

sentiments: of such he had a righteous horror. He was a little hot-tempered—a little difficult to manage sometimes; but his patience, under his great affliction, never flagged. In connexion with it the most singular fact about him remains untold. He never acknowledged that he was blind: apparently he did not know it. Whether he unwittingly deceived himself, or sought, by a loving fraud, to deceive those dearest to him, none could ever tell. The growth of this calamity had been so slow—its nature, as his family knew, was so hopeless—that the daughter's chief care, after her mother's death, was to break the force of the blow which she dreaded so much, when her father should learn that he was becoming gradually but incurably blind. When he first came to England, after his wife's death, Mr. Marston had still a glimmering of light. Six months later, even that little light was darkened. But he had begun by inveighing strongly against the fogs of our country, which on the brightest summer's day enveloped everything around him; and he still kept up the habit. He would complain fifty times a day that it was "very dark," and wonder whether they had link-boys in London streets in such perilous weather. No one could be cruel enough to destroy the innocent delusion, if such it really was. The lamp *did* give a very bad light; the

coals *were* very indifferent; all the household, to judge by their own accounts, lived in a constant fog, and groped their way by faith, like the master, from room to room. He had got to know the house well—that part in which he lived, at least—and the long terrace, which he trod, with the help of his servant's arm, for one hour every day.

Out of several children born to Mr. Marston, the two youngest alone survived. Rupert came into the world when his father was already middle-aged; and by reason of his mother's health, which obliged them to live abroad, the boy never saw England until he was sent over to Harrow. Mr. Marston did not greatly prize classical learning: he could not see that it had much to do with the practical side of life; but he had himself been at a public school, and he was a great man for precedent; therefore his son went to Harrow. When it came to be a question of Rupert's going to college, however, Mr. Marston pooh-poohed the idea. For a man who was not to enter one of the learned professions, what was the use of it? Rupert was to be a merchant, which was a sensible, lucrative calling; towards which, from certain circumstances, Mr. Marston's sympathies had been drawn for several years past. His uncle, who had left him all his property, had been a merchant in Lisbon. The successor to this uncle,

in the house, was one Lozados, who was a personal friend of Mr. Marston's, and with whom, at Cintra, he had resided, in habits of intimacy for many years. The house of Lozados was well known and respected, uniting, as it did, a great banking firm with one of the largest mercantile connexions in Portugal. Mr. Marston himself had never had anything to do with the business. When he was a young man his uncle had died, leaving him, unconditionally, a large sum of money. It had been optional with him to withdraw this fortune from the hands of his uncle's successor, but he had not chosen to do so. He had watched how the prosperity of the house (not without fluctuations, as revolutions and such like agitated the money-market) steadily increased; and he had resolved that his son should embrace a career which, with prudence and foresight, offered so many practical advantages. He was not to be brought up like a wealthy man's only son: no, he was to live thriftily awhile, and early acquire business habits. There were still living men who declared that in this Mr. Marston departed altogether from the precedent of his own youth. They asserted that he had once been a dashing young spark, renowned for his feats across country, and for his driving of a certain yellow Stanhope in the ring; but all this had

been before his marriage, and in talking to his son he ignored those days. It would have been natural, under the circumstances, that Rupert, if he was "to acquire business habits," should enter Lazados' house; but Mr. Marston, who had been obliged to live abroad so many years on account of his wife's health, remained a thorough Englishman at heart, and he had a great dread of his son's becoming a foreigner. He preferred, therefore, the young man's entering, upon less advantageous terms, a merchant's house in London, to the more brilliant opening he could have had in Lisbon. And certain undesirable love-passages with a fair lady there, when the boy was only nineteen, confirmed the father's decision, and hastened its being carried into execution.

The various phases of the young man's life had left their traces on his character. A boyhood at Harrow, with a wandering home in Spain or Italy, where he went for a few weeks from time to time; an opening manhood over a desk in the City, with an occasional holiday in the intoxicating society of some foreign capital, this had been Rupert Marston's life. He was by nature passionate and easily stirred, but he possessed a strong will; and his feelings were generally under the control incumbent on his father's son, and an Englishman bred at a public school.

He was not expansive; and, except towards women, he rarely showed what he felt. With them, even the very plainest, his manner had in it something chivalrous and protecting, which attracted old women and young girls alike; and he had got into more than one scrape in consequence. Women, in a word, were at once his strongest and his weakest point; and because he mistrusted himself, he had rarely sought their society of late, keeping resolutely in his narrow path of daily work with unslackening energy.

That was the secret of his character. Whatever he did, he did it with all his soul and all his strength. He had been eight years now in Mr. Claxton's house, and he was an excellent man of business, with immense powers of application, and a zeal which never slackened. In the course of a few years more, if his father chose to disburse a certain sum, there was very little doubt but that Mr. Claxton would admit Rupert as a junior partner into the house. And the knowledge that that gentleman had a high opinion of his son, and that he placed an amount of confidence in him rarely accorded to so young a man, were sources of just pride to Mr. Marston. The relations between Rupert and his father were not common. The latter still exercised his parental authority undiminished, although the former was, in consequence

of his father's blindness, almost absolute master to do as he pleased. Still, with forbearance and tact, he strove as patiently to bring the old man round to his way of thinking, and showed as much solicitude in obtaining his sanction and approval as though his father were still in the vigour and prime of life. In many respects Rupert was like his father; in his strong, well cut, aquiline nose, and deep-set eyes, no less than in his manly, robust temper, and in the serviceable, rather than showy, qualities of his mind. He was a man whom other men would find it difficult to "*do*;" but whom a woman—if haply he should fall foul of one so minded—might twist round her finger at pleasure.

Mr. Marston's daughter was seven years younger than her brother. In half an hour's walk through London streets you will see handsomer faces than hers, but you will not often find one you remember so distinctly many days after; one which sets you thinking, as this face did, about the character and story and future of its owner.

Her story hitherto was to be told in few words; her character can, at best, be only indicated here: it will be shown, as far as I have the power, in its strength and its weakness, hereafter.

She had been bred on the Continent; not bred after foreign ways, however, but by a fond and

careful mother, who was as English as she could be, in all the best sense of that word. Mrs. Marston had not thought of making her daughter brilliantly accomplished; and, indeed, except to read aloud well, there was no one thing which Olivia did better than other girls. She was a tolerable musician; and she spoke more or less correctly the languages of those countries in which she had travelled—that was all. If by "a good education," therefore, is meant the labour taken to acquire a great variety of knowledge, Olivia was certainly not highly educated. But in that teaching which fits men and women to bear their burdens in life —in those noble lessons which prepare the character to resist alike the enervating effects of prosperity and the shocks of adversity—Mrs. Marston had spared no pains with her young daughter. She died when Olivia was nineteen. It was the girl's first grief; and the brave help she brought to her blind stricken father, in this his sore need, was the first fruits of the mother's teaching.

But she was by no means a faultless young person; and the mother's training had only partially succeeded in counteracting the foibles of nature. The result was one that is not uncommon, when nature and education struggle for the mastery. She was what is called "very inconsistent." People who only knew her a little, could not understand

how any one so impulsive at times, should, at others, seem cold and guarded; how haply, when they looked that she should be angered, she was patient; and then again, why, suddenly, at mention of some disloyalty or wrong, the fire kindled in her cheek and eye, and she spoke words which, perhaps, had been better left unsaid. She was rapid in her decisions, which being founded on strong instincts of right and wrong, often lacked worldly wisdom; indeed, of this latter possession, she was (partly from circumstances, no doubt) singularly deficient. What will people say? was a question which it never occurred to her to ask; not because she despised conventionalities, but simply because her dealings with "the world" were so very limited that the thing never troubled her. She was always a little shy, a little cold, with strangers; she was not used to them; but there was not a particle of vanity or self-concern about her, and she very soon thawed. She had seen a great deal of life, and very little of society —which is a nice distinction. She had read a great deal, in a desultory way, and knew a great deal more than most girls of her age about all the complicated questions, the dangers, and difficulties of life. Love, save in the shadowy form wherein he presents himself to every woman, had as yet no place in her imagination. Of that great ruling

mystery in life she was, practically, more ignorant than many of her juniors. She lived very much in a world of her own, and felt small desire to interrupt the habits of seclusion which her mother's death and her father's blindness had brought about. What attraction could Fordingham neighbours have for her? She discouraged their advances, however, chiefly from the fear of anything that would derange her father's fixed routine of habits. She was his mainstay. All that was to be done she did. Her chief thought was how to spare him any addition to the heavy care under which his life was shadowed.

Except when she was gardening, or driving, or about some household duty, she was by his side. Rupert was off to the City early every morning; it was she who read the *Times* to her father; who wrote his journal (such a journal as it was! but he would have thought that heaven and earth were going to pass away had it remained unwritten); who brought him his cheques to sign; and who was constantly at hand to answer questions as to the weather. Their talk was of out-of-the-world things, and not such gossip as the Fordingham folk enjoyed. Of perilous escapes and marvellous surprises; anecdotes of the past, of queer characters whom he had met in his youth;—such were the

staple subjects between the old man and his daughter.

Of evenings, when Rupert came home, she always read aloud some stirring tale of adventure, or the explorations of the last African traveller. In such books Mr. Marston took the keenest interest, and was disappointed if anything occurred to interfere with the evening's reading. The only interruption which at all compensated to him for the loss, was the occasional visit of two old Spanish friends of his—City men—who often came down to dine at the Cedars, having a general invitation to do so. They were almost the only visitors Mr. Marston ever saw; he never talked or thought about the people who lived at a stone's-throw from his gate. Though very far from what is generally understood as an imaginative man he, too, dwelt in a world of his own—a world of the past; and such being the case, it was no wonder that the seclusion in which his daughter lived never struck him as uncommon, or undesirable.

This mode of life would have continued unchanged but for the arrival of a new inmate at the Cedars.

With that arrival, a more mundane element entered the house. Mr. Marston had no longer the uninterrupted benefit of his daughter's society.

His enjoyment of those long quiet evenings was broken into. And though the reading was resumed from time to time, it was never the same thing again. For there was one listener too much, who never thoroughly liked it.

Miss Clorinda Pringle was Mrs. Marston's elder sister. For the last five-and-thirty years she had lived alone, and she was now sixty-nine. Mrs. Marston had always been fond of her sister; the strong tide of girlhood never having loosened under absence and the widening dissimilarity of their characters. As often as circumstances had permitted during the lifetime of the former they had met; but this, owing to the married lady's state of health, and the unmarried lady's dread of crossing the water, was not often. It cannot be said that Mr. Marston felt any very lively regret at this. He and his sister-in-law did not suit; and during his dear wife's lifetime he was just as well pleased that the ocean should divide them. Now the case was different. All that was connected, however remotely, with his departed wife, had a value in his eyes. *Her* he never named, even to his children, but they felt the secret cause of many a change in his thoughts and opinions. So when Miss Pringle drove down to the Cedars for the first time after the Marston's arrival from abroad, Olivia was not surprised to see how cordially her

father greeted her aunt Clorinda. It was so long since they had met that Olivia scarcely remembered her aunt. She found a little lively old lady, very much dressed, with a flaxen wig, and great juvenility of manner; talking very fast, and chiefly about herself; addicted to society, a great fidget, somewhat of a screw; but in the ordinary intercourse of life, good-natured, and not given to evil speaking. Of course she was selfish; it would be fatal to all of us, having no creature on earth to think of but ourselves for five-and-thirty years. She was well off, but had no home; none of the small cares and burdens to be borne for others, which a home brings with it. Her own dress, her whist, the misdemeanours of a maid, who came into office generally, with a new wig, once a year, (that being the utmost period any woman had ever been known to stand Miss Pringle's "ways"); —these, with the performance of her duties to society, filled up the measure of her thoughts and time. She dwelt in lodgings—at Bath, at Brighton, at Harrowgate, and occasionally, as now, in London. She was delighted to see her relations again: thought Olivia "very like her poor mother," was overflowing in her recollections of the past, and appeared entirely to have forgotten that her brother-in-law had not always been quite as affectionate as he now seemed.

But Olivia knew her father so well that she saw, after the second long day Aunt Clo had spent at the Cedars, that the spinster's exuberance of talk was a sore trial to Mr. Marston. He was getting a little deaf—just enough to make it necessary for those who addressed him to speak distinctly; and Aunt Clo seemed never able to get rid of her words fast enough. Yet Mr. Marston's patience held out. Apparently he was resolved to compensate to Miss Pringle for all his sins of omission in past years. At last, one day, when she was gone, after having bemoaned her forlorn condition, and her solitude at such times as she was not in society, and the discomforts of a lodging, Mr. Marston turned to his daughter and said,

"I have been calculating. Your aunt is seventy next birthday, Olivia."

"Is she, father? She doesn't look as much."

"And it is very lonely and uncomfortable for her living all by herself. She seems fond of you, I think—eh?"

"Well—yes—I dare say she is. It was very kind of her to give me those topazes yesterday."

"Your aunt wants to come and live with us, I'm sure of it."

His daughter said nothing.

"I think we ought to ask her."

Still she was dumbfounded.

"Shall you mind it very much, Olive?"

"I, father?—it is you. I mean—of course I cannot mind anything you like;—but——"

"I don't like it, Olivia. I don't pretend to like it. Your aunt gabbles like a magpie. I can't hear one word in a dozen she says. But she is lonely and old—and I think some one—some one who is *gone*—you know who, my dear—would like to offer her a home if she were alive. That is why I do it."

Then Olivia said no more. She knew that, however distasteful to her father, the thing was to be; unless her aunt should decline the offer. She did not decline it. She came, bringing a maid, and paying her due share of the household expenses. It was very characteristic of Mr. Marston, that after the great sacrifice he had made, he should charge his daughter to see that her aunt settled her accounts punctually every week.

The coming of Aunt Clo infused altogether a new element into that quiet household.

CHAPTER III.

MAKING ACQUAINTANCE.

"My dear Olivia, I cannot hear of your moping yourself to death in this absurd way, seeing no one. I have no idea of moping myself, I assure you. It is very bad for my nerves. Dr. Flaherty told me when I was at Harrowgate that social relaxation was half the battle, and we sat down such a delightful party every day to dinner at the 'Granby,' it quite assisted digestion, I'm sure. I always get ill when I'm alone."

"Well, you see, Aunt Clo, you run no risk of that here, as papa and I never go out."

"That's just it! It is perfectly absurd, a girl, at your age, shutting yourself up like this; why I—I—I'm not very young, perhaps, but I should consider it quite wrong—yes, *wrong*—to shut

myself up as if I were in a convent or monastery, or something. As to your papa, of course that is another thing. He would go about if he *could*, poor man, but he can't."

"Well, aunt, I can only say I don't feel as if it would amuse me a bit to go into Fordingham society. I shouldn't know what to talk about to the people. I don't think we should have many subjects in common; and, on the whole, I'm sure I'm happier at home here."

"Well, it is vastly ridiculous of you, and indeed I think it is quite selfish, Olivia, for I believe your father would be quite spirited up by hearing a little gossip about his neighbours, and seeing one or two occasionally."

"He was never fond of gossip at any time—now less than ever."

"Mr. Marston," said Miss Pringle, veering suddenly round in her chair, so as to face the old gentleman, "shouldn't you like a friend or two sometimes to drop in here? I'm sure you would."

"To drop *what*?" said Mr. Marston, with his hand up to his ear.

"Dear me! your papa's hearing gets worse and worse, Olivia. To drop *in here*—to drop you a *call*," she shouted.

"I'm not deaf, my dear Miss Pringle. I like people to speak distinctly—but you need never

scream at me. No, I can't say that I should like that sort of thing dropped on me at all hours. Olivia keeps these rooms so dark that it is impossible to see who comes in. And then the fog; it's as much as one can do to find the way to one's mouth. Does the fog get in your head, Miss Pringle, as it does into mine?"

"Bless your heart! Mr. Marston, there's no fog. It is a bright April day."

"Hush!" whispered Olivia, flushing. "You forget, Aunt Clo, we never contradict him about the fog." Then she said aloud, "It is a beautiful day, father, but we are too near London not to feel the influence of the smoke. Besides, coming from a clear sunny climate, as we do, of course it seems worse to us."

"Well, at least you will allow that it is quite warm, Mr. Marston," cried Aunt Clo.

"I should say it was both dark and cold," returned the blind man, "but I am glad if others don't find it so. Olivia," he continued, extending his hand over the fire, "these coals don't throw out any heat; you should get some more."

"I will put on a log of wood; that will make a blaze."

"Gracious! I must go to the window," exclaimed Aunt Clo. "The skin is nearly burnt off my face as it is. Do you use milk of roses,

Olivia? You ought to. It's the way I've kept my complexion as I have. And you shouldn't sit over that great roasting fire."

"My father likes my sitting here, and I don't feel it."

"Olivia," he said, turning round to her side, "when will Rupert be back? It is quite dark already—eh?"

"He will not be back for a long time yet, it gets dark so soon."

"Dark!" cried Aunt Clo (but she was too far for Mr. Marston to hear her), "why, we are going out to drive. How can you talk so? It is time to go and put on our things; the carriage will be round in ten minutes."

And Aunt Clo frisked out of the room.

"Father, we are going out for a short drive."

"Dear me! what can be the pleasure of driving in such weather? The coachman will be sure to lose his way, or drive you up against something, and smash the panels in. Why can't you stay at home? Home is much the best place in these fogs."

"So it is; but we foolish women like going out, no matter what the weather is. And John, you know, is so steady, there is never any danger with him. My aunt is anxious to return some visits that have been paid her, and she would be unhappy not to go."

"What a woman that is," muttered the old man, "never quiet for a single half-hour. There is nothing to be done, is there, Olivia?"

"Nothing at all, but to sit still by your fireside, and pity our restlessness in wanting to go out in such weather."

"I *did* take my walk, you know," he said, quickly. "And then you wrote my journal, and we did the accounts together. Did you send that pound to the soldier's wife you read to me about in the *Times*?"

"Yes, father, I sent it without your name."

"That was right. And you wrote my letter to Lozados? Well, then there's nothing more to be done. No cheque to sign, I hope?"

"Oh dear no," returned Olivia, smiling. "No cheques, nothing at all to do but to sit still. Shall Fritz come and be with you?"

Mr. Marston would never admit that he wanted any one. Hence his reply to Miss Pringle's suggestion of friends "dropping in." Hence, too, his invariable rejoinder when Olivia proposed his German servant coming to sit with him.

"Well, he can come if he likes; but remember, I don't want him, Olivia, and I'm not going out again."

But as his daughter knew, notwithstanding this protest, that her father found the old Alsatian

soldier, with his recollections of Napoleon and his stories of the retreat from Moscow, very pleasant company, Fritz was sent up-stairs.

"M'sieu feut se promener encore un betit beu?" asked Fritz, as usual, on entering the room.

"Ah! Qu'est-ce que vous me proposez là?" was the reply in good slow strong English-French, delivered with indignation, as though the proposal were quite unheard of, "Par ung pareil temps, Fritz . . . Ah!"

"Si m'sieu feut b'en essayer, il fait un temps doux, comme . . . de la pâte d amande!" returned Fritz, as he bent over his master.

"Il ne faut pas congtredire la raison, Fritz. N'est-ce pas que le brouillard vous monte dans la tête?"

"Parbleu, oui, m'sieu, mais—ça n'empêche pas —le zoleil va son train, tout de même."

And, after a great deal more persuasion, Fritz got his master out upon the terrace. There was always a grand battle to obtain this second walk.

Olivia, as in duty bound, accompanied her aunt in the round of visits the spinster was delighted to have to return within a fortnight after her arrival; but on this afternoon Mrs. Pomfret was the only lady they found at home.

They were shown into a large and very sumptuous drawing-room, where a stout comely woman

of fifty sat at work, talking to a young man who had all the appearance of being at home, as he lounged back on the sofa, with his feet upon a chair. A short, smooth, fresh-faced girl stood near the fireplace. She had apparently just come in from riding. Her hat was in her hand, and the end of her dark hair, slipping from its comb, had partially fallen.

"I'm delighted to be at home when you called," said Mrs. Pomfret, rising. "It is such a chance ever finding any one. Kate, my love, you know Miss Marston—my daughter, Miss Pringle—and Miss Marston, allow me to introduce my nephew, Mr. Westbrook. Is your brother at home, Kate?"

Kate was understood to say "No," while Miss Pringle looked round her, and kept exclaiming, "Dear me, what a beautiful house! Really quite a palace, Mrs. Pomfret; quite fitted for a *fête*, I'm sure!"

The lady smiled, and sank her voice into a confidential tone.

"We *do* occasionally gather our neighbours together, Miss Pringle; but to tell you the truth there are very few with whom we can be intimate here, and those we see more of a *quiet* way at dinner."

"With a rubber of whist, I dare say, afterwards?" suggested Miss Pringle.

"Exactly; or a little music, as the case may be. Sometimes the young people get up a waltz, when we get down a few gentlemen from London. Our society," she added, shaking her head, "is very limited. One is obliged to be particular, you know. *Such* people as we have coming here, and taking good houses!"

"Indeed?" said her visitor, with elevated brows. "Dear me! now, when I looked round in church and saw such a number of—of smart bonnets, and so on, I thought you must have quite a large society here."

"Mostly retired trades," said Mrs. Pomfret, mournfully. "Some of them not *even* retired."

Now Mrs. Pomfret's father was a soap-boiler. I have refrained from mentioning the painful fact hitherto; but the truth, sooner or later, must be told. Mr. Pomfret, who was a gentleman (though an uncommonly dull one) in every sense of the word, and a sleeping partner in a bank, had married Mrs. Pomfret, no doubt in consideration of her very large fortune. She had made him a good wife, and, according to her lights, she was an excellent mother. She had, besides, infinitely more brains than her husband. Her failings it is unnecessary to point out, for they lay upon the surface, and sometimes obtruded themselves, indeed, more annoyingly than serious vices might have

done; so that, in this manner, much that was kind and excellent was obscured.

"I dare say Mr. Marston feels, as I do, that with daughters, one can't be too particular, Miss Pringle. It is a great responsibility. With only a brother, too, to chaperone her. I can quite understand Mr. Marston's not caring that his daughter should make many acquaintance at first; but now that *you* are come, Miss Pringle, and can act as mamma, I do hope we shall see more of your niece."

"I'm sure you're very kind. I was telling her, only to-day, that I meant to break through her conventual habits. Quite ridiculous, a girl of her age, moping herself in that way, isn't it? And to do Mr. Marston justice, though he says he doesn't like society himself, I'm sure he would never stand in the way of Olivia's going out."

"Charming person she seems to be—so refined-looking, so unlike the common herd, Miss Pringle."

That lady evidently accepted this as a subtle compliment to herself.

"She takes after the Pringles, I believe; and there is a strong likeness runs throughout the family to the portraits of our great ancestor who was henchman to Robert the Bruce."

"*In*deed!" exclaimed Mrs. Pomfret, with great unction. "How very interesting! What a very

old family! Well, Miss Marston, I must say, has a great air of nobility."

"We are all said to have that *je ne sais quoi* which is seen in the portraits of the great henchman; but I believe my colouring, the colour of my hair, at least, is more like his than Olivia's; but then *she*, you see, has a touch of the Marstons."

By what process of reasoning the spinster contrived to believe that she was unadulterated Pringle (unless she could show that that race had bred in and in throughout all these generations), while in her niece the pure type was marred, it would have been curious to learn. Mrs. Pomfret was quite sharp enough to perceive this little difficulty, but her mind was held in thrall by the fact of her visitor's great antiquity—of family, and she forbore from any indiscreet question. The conversation between the two elder ladies gained strength and volume as it flowed along. It meandered through a variety of fields, but it never slackened; that little disclosure of the henchman had given it a marvellous impetus.

The "young people" were, in the mean time, improving acquaintance at the other end of the room. The gentleman who had been introduced under the name of Westbrook had sauntered towards the young ladies; but, as though he felt

himself too tall, or was too indolent, to remain standing at his full height—and he was nearly six feet three—he leaned, with his arms folded, against the embrasure of the window, and in this attitude occasionally dropped a word or two into the girls' conversation. He was well-looking, and better made than most very tall men are: broad in the chest and straight in the legs, with good hands and feet. The upper part of the face was very handsome, but the mouth, distinctly seen under the slight fair moustache, was not a pleasant mouth in repose, though when he spoke the fine even teeth and a pleasant voice obliterated its disagreeable effect. The manner was that of a man careless and lazy until roused—accustomed, probably, to conquest—and so completely self-assured as to render effort, restraint, or hesitation, entirely impossible with him. In a vulgar man this would have been insupportable, but Julian Westbrook was a gentleman. There was that about him which might attract or repel you, but his manner could never be thought offensive. Miss Marston having conceived of most Englishmen that they were shy, stiff, and ill at ease, was agreeably surprised with this specimen. It chanced that, after a while, Miss Pomfret asked her if she rode. Olivia replied that she had done so a good deal in Spain, whereupon Westbrook observed that he had

ridden through the greater part of Spain the year before. They fell to talking of different places known to them both, and this link once found, a chain quickly formed itself. Westbrook was roused. He had been to Cintra. He knew the house where the Marstons had lived for five winters. He even knew a merchant there who was one of their oldest friends. The interchange of reminiscence was so animated that Kate Pomfret found herself completely stranded and forgotten. When Miss Pringle rose to take leave her niece was quite surprised to find that more than twenty minutes had slipped away. Westbrook conducted them to the carriage.

"What a very fine man, Olivia," exclaims Aunt Clo, as the carriage drives off. "How I do like tall men! I wish Rupert were a little taller, Olivia."

"Rupert is quite tall enough, I think," said his sister, tetchy for her brother's reputation, even in the matter of inches. "He is nearly five feet ten. Those very tall men never know what to do with their legs."

"Well, *this* one had *his* legs most comfortably stretched on a chair when we came in," laughed the old lady. "I thought it quite a pity to disturb him. But I suppose he was repaid by talking to you. You seem to get on famously together."

"Yes," said Olivia. "We got on very well, for he knows dear San Salvador, and all my favourite walks at Cintra: and we found we had mutual acquaintances, too. I little thought ever to meet any one at the Pomfrets' whom I could talk to about the dear old place."

"Well, now, I hope you're obliged to me for making you come out of your shell. Mrs. Pomfret seems really a *charming* woman, and quite sociably inclined. And what a beautiful house! I'm sure they must have very nice parties."

"Do ladies in England wear flowers in their caps of a morning? She is good-natured, I should think, but rather oppressively over civil. I thought the daughter pretty—didn't you, aunt?"

"I can't say I looked at her much. I saw a young person in a Joseph, or something of the kind, who didn't seem to me to open her lips. You and the tall good-looking man—what's his name?—had the talking all to yourselves, Olivia."

"Oh, Aunt Clo! I hope I wasn't rude," said Olivia, colouring with compunction. "I was interested in talking about Cintra, and I'm afraid I forgot her."

In Mrs. Pomfret's drawing-room, meantime, the departed visitors were, of course, equally being discussed.

"Well, Julian, what do you think of our new

beauty? I am so annoyed that Lionel wasn't here. Such a good opportunity to have introduced him, and then he could have gone and called."

"Catch him, my dear aunt," said Westbrook smiling. "I can't say that I think he has had any great loss in missing the opportunity of being introduced to your beauty. He can see better-looking women any day."

"Oh, come, Julian!" laughed Kate; "that's rather good. I'm not blind, you know. You never look half as interested or animated when you're talking to Miss Wells, or Miss Bligh, as you did just now. You may say what you like, I'm sure you *do* admire Miss Marston."

"Do I, Kate? Well, of course, you know best. I grant the girl is thorough-bred-looking, and——"

"*That* she has every right to be," struck in Mrs. Pomfret. "The Pringles, it seems, are a *very* old family. Their ancestor was henchman to Robert Bruce."

"Oh," said Julian, dryly. "Well, the descendant of King Robert the Bruce's henchman is too sallow. There is something *piquant* about her face, but she don't carry enough flesh. That isn't at all the sort of thing for Lionel. He won't admire her."

"I didn't say that *he* would," remarked his provoking cousin, *sotto voce.* "What I said was that *you* did."

"I don't know when," said Mrs. Pomfret, ruminating, "I don't know when I have seen a young person who has taken my fancy so much. So distinguished—so *very* distinguished, Julian. And Miss Pringle is really a very nice lively old lady; a little vain, a little foolish, perhaps, but really very pleasant. I must ask them to dinner at once. Now, what day can you come down, Julian?—and we'll try and get up a little party; only, don't throw us over as you did last time, because your uncle doesn't like it."

"I didn't promise. When I promise I always keep my engagements."

"Hem!—well, I don't know about that. At all events, will you promise now?"

"Yes. Next Wednesday or Friday; either day is free," said he, referring to his engagement-book.

"Good. I will give them the choice; they can't well escape then. I must make sure of Lionel first, however: and remember, I count upon you."

CHAPTER IV.

DOMESTIC DISCUSSION.

OLIVIA was struck with her brother's manner that evening. She thought he looked anxious, and seemed preoccupied. Indeed, he took so little part in the conversation that even Aunt Clo, who talked too much to observe such things generally, had her attention roused to the fact; and, as usual, she did not hesitate a moment in communicating the result of her observation to its object.

"Why, what is come to you to-night, Rupert? You can't open your lips. I suppose you're in love. Come, tell us the name of the fair lady. It must be *that*, you know; because it's quite unnatural your sitting there when you come from town, and having nothing to tell us—not a word to

say—when we're expecting you to give us all the news.",

Thus rallied, Rupert laughed, and exerted himself to answer his aunt in a becoming spirit.

"You're quite right, Aunt Clo; you have an extraordinary gift of always divining the truth. I'm over head and ears in love with an enchanting creature I met in an omnibus. We had a shower just as I was leaving the City. I couldn't get a cab, and I didn't choose to get wet *out*side a 'bus, so I did what I particularly dislike, generally—got *in*. I was rewarded, in this instance, by sitting opposite the most lovely creature I think I have ever seen."

Olivia looked up from her work to see if Rupert was in earnest, or only inventing for Aunt Clo's amusement. She could not tell; but in either case she, of course, felt very sure that the anxious expression of his face had no sort of connexion with his omnibus beauty.

"Well, and of course you followed her? And who did she turn out to be? I was once in an omnibus myself, and I remember a man staring at me; and I was so uncomfortable because there was a woman with two babies opposite me, and another who would suck oranges, and the juice came over my black silk cloak, and I thought it was altogether very disagreeable; and certainly no one

with any sort of pretensions to—to *appearance* ought ever to go in one (indeed, if it hadn't been for the rain, I shouldn't, of course, have got into one then); so that I really pity your beauty, Rupert, if she was a lady."

"I tell you, Aunt Clo, she was simply divine. How can you institute a doubt, after that, as to whether she was a lady? Very modest; very quietly dressed; the loveliest little hands you ever saw, which looked as if they had been picking rosebuds all their life—no harder work than that. Then such hair and eyes! She got out in Tottenham-court-road, and I watched her get into another 'bus—a Hampstead one. That is all I know about her; but my peace of mind is irrevocably gone."

"Bless me! Why didn't you follow her, then, and find out who she was? I remember once being followed. It was at Tunbridge, and I was walking up and down the Pantiles; and every turn I took, the man turned also, until at last it became so conspicuous that I had to go home. I have reason to believe that the man learnt who I was, for he discontinued his pursuit after *that* (knowing, of course, that it would be hopeless); and indeed he had the good taste whenever we met generally to look the other way, which I thought showed great delicacy."

"Great," said her nephew. "But I showed

greater, for I would not follow my beauty at all. In the first place, I thought it would distress her to be tracked from omnibus to omnibus in that way; in the next, I knew you would be waiting for dinner, and I had only just time to catch the train."

When both Mr. Marston and Miss Pringle were gone to bed, Olivia, as she wished her brother good night, whispered—

"You are anxious, dear Rupert, about some thing—I do not ask you *what*; for if it were anything in which I could be of use, I know you would tell me."

"I will tell you, Olive. Though my trouble is not one you can understand, the difficulty in which it places me you will. I have reason to believe that it would be a very good thing if I could persuade my father to remove a large portion of his property from Lozados' house in Lisbon, where it all now is. But, as you know, this is just one of the few subjects upon which it is very difficult to talk to him. From the loss of his sight, now his mind broods over anything of this kind, and agitates itself so much upon any matter of business that I feel afraid of the effect of entering into a discussion with him on such a subject. Besides which, his prejudices on certain points are strong, and I doubt any arguments of mine having effect

in moving them. Still I feel it a grave responsibility to withhold from telling him what I think."

Olive stood still for a moment, the lighted candle in her hand.

"Tell him, Rupert," she said, decisively. "If you think it right, you musn't hesitate to tell him."

"But you always dread his being agitated, and you know the discussion is sure to agitate him. If I speak to him at all upon the matter, I must speak plainly."

"Mayn't it save him from greater agitation hereafter, dear? I never would say anything to worry him, unless it's absolutely right and necessary; but, then, I think—indeed, I'm *sure*—Rupert, one oughtn't to hesitate. Tell him to-morrow morning openly all you think, and leave me to tranquillise his mind afterwards as best I may."

Rupert Marston delayed going to town for a couple of hours on the following morning in order to have the necessary interview with his father. The old gentleman must not be disturbed out of his ordinary routine let what might happen. He breakfasted in his own room, and left it as the clock struck ten. Before that hour none but Fritz ever saw him. He would have looked upon it as ridiculous, and been annoyed had either of his chil-

dren in their anxiety after his health ever penetrated this morning sanctuary. At ten, therefore, on this morning as usual, he entered the library, his journal-book in his hand, ready for Olivia to make the litte entry of monotonous sameness which he would not for worlds have omitted. Rupert was here alone, waiting to receive him. Olivia had contrived, on some haberdashery pretence or other, to get Aunt Clo away to her own room.

"Good morning, father."

"You here? Why, how comes it you are not in town? Where's Olivia? Ain't she here to write my journal?"

"She is engaged with my aunt for a a few minutes. She will be down presently." Then, with a great effort, "I want to speak to you, father, about keeping all your money out of England—in Lozados' or any foreign bank. The interest they pay is very large I know, but there is a great feeling prevails in this country of the insecurity of these banks. Lozados is a great friend of yours: I am aware that you will be very loth to remove your money from his keeping; but all the men of business whom I know regard it as very unsafe to keep the bulk of one's property in such hands. I think it right to tell you this, father, as I have now of course more opportunities

of hearing the opinions of various classes of men in the City upon these subjects than you have. What I now mention is not only the opinion of Mr. Claxton: it is universal."

Mr. Marston was bending forwards, his lips parted, and his hand raised to his ear so as not to lose a syllable his son uttered. His cheek did not flush; neither did his eye kindle. A slightly sarcastic smile just touched the corners of his mouth. His son was amazed to see how calmly his father heard him to an end.

"There is nothing new under the sun, Rupert. I knew all you have been saying five-and-thirty years ago, when we first went to live abroad. The fortune your great uncle left me had been for years, as you know, in the hands of Lozados, who became his partner in the mercantile house, and I scarcely thought myself justified, when I inherited his money, in removing it from that house. I shouldn't think myself justified in doing so *now*, certainly. They have always proved punctual in their payments—honourable in all their dealings. I have never had any reason to regret continuing to bank with them, though, of course, I have been urged, over and over again, to transfer my money here and get one-third less income! No, Master Rupert, you can do as you please when I am gone, but as long as I live—it won't be very long—I

don't desert my old friends. Why, Lozados and I are just the same age."

"I am sorry, father"—and the son's manner showed that his father's words hurt him—I am sorry you should think I would not respect your wishes at all times—or that I have any selfish feeling in what I say. It is to spare you future anxiety that I ask you to consider whether it is not advisable to take at least a portion of your property out of Lozados' hands. He may be the most honourable man in the world, but he may be unfortunate. There exists a feeling in the City that his house is not very secure. It is known to have sustained heavy losses lately."

"So it did in 1834, and it tided them over. Every one said, then, it was in danger; but I wouldn't take a penny out, and perhaps I and a few others were instrumental in keeping him afloat."

Rupert was silent: then he resolved to make one more effort.

"At least, father, will you let Olivia's fortune be taken out, and vested in the hands of trustees for her? If she married an Englishman to-morrow, he——"

"There is time enough to talk of that when she does marry," interrupted Mr. Marston, raising his head. "At present Olivia doesn't seem anxious

to leave me, and where I think it well that *my* money should be, I believe she is content that *hers* should remain."

There was a slight reproach conveyed in the words which was not lost on Rupert. He felt there was nothing more to be said or to be done. He had expected to find his father difficult to persuade, excited, irritable; but he was not prepared to find him so ready to reply to every argument he had to adduce so clear in his views, so impossible to alarm, so tenacious of the purpose which he had held unchanged through all these years. He saw it was hopeless; with a sigh he left the room, and taking his hat walked out of the house without seeing Olivia. When she came down a few minutes later, in some anxiety as to how her father should have borne the interview with Rupert, she found the former sitting tranquilly in his arm-chair with an amused smile upon his face.

"Is that you, Olivia? I've had Rupert here, my dear, full of wise saws which he has picked up in the City, and trying to frighten me about my old friend Lozados. The boys in the present day amuse me; they are so mighty prudent and clever. Why, as I told him, they tried to make me take all my money out of Lozados' hands long before Rupert was even born or thought of, so I'm not

going to be terrified by that cry of 'wolf' now—eh, Olivia?"

"The wolf did come at last, father," said the girl, gravely. Then she came and sat at his feet, and took his hand between hers.

"What! Rupert has been trying to frighten *you*, too, has he?" exclaimed the acute old man. "Now, listen to me, child. For nearly fifty-five years I have managed my own affairs, and pretty well, too, I flatter myself. I've always been a careful man—you know my favourite proverb, 'Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves.' You act upon that, and tell Rupert to act upon it, Olivia, and not to trouble his head about Lozados. He is as safe as the Bank of England. He has been my friend for five-and-thirty years, and my uncle's before me. I am not going to give him up now for any boy's whim."

He spoke for the first time with some heat, and brought down his thin hand smartly upon the arm of his chair as he finished. Olivia saw, as her brother had done, that it would be worse than useless to pursue the subject further. It was so very seldom she had ever heard her father assume this tone, since age and infirmity had rendered him so dependent upon his children, that she saw at once it would be not only unbecoming but likely to make him seriously angry, if the discus-

sion were renewed. And however sorry she might feel for Rupert's anxiety, she could not but honour the noble trustfulness which prompted her father to refuse to withdraw his fortune out of the hands of his old friend. Yet this was the man who prided himself on his shrewd, practical sense; and held in horror all romance and sentiment.

To him, in the course of that same morning, enters Aunt Clo, bearing in her hand an open note, highly scented, and having an elaborate mauve-coloured cipher outside. Miss Pringle has manœuvred, in her turn, to get Olivia well out of the way.

After this necessary preliminary she sits deliberately down, with battering-rams and every other implement of war before the fortress, which she is resolved to carry either by a *coup de main* or by undermining, and all the slow artifices of a siege. She draws her chair close to her blind brother-in-law, and then she coughs in order that he may know that it is she.

"Very dark," observes Mr. Marston. "Does the fog get into your head?"

"Oh dear, no—yes, I mean—yes, very much, of course. But what I came to talk to you about now was Olivia, Mr. Marston — *Olivia*" (very loud).

"Don't scream. Well, what about her?"

"Why, you know, I am rather anxious about her."

"God bless my soul! why every one seems to be anxious about something or other to-day. It must be the weather. Why, the girl is well enough, Miss Pringle; what ails her?"

"Oh, nothing *ails* her, exactly. Her bodily health is good enough. She would be improved by being a little fatter, perhaps; but it isn't *that* —I was thin when I was her age. All the symmetry of my form came at a much later date, and——"

"Did it?" said Mr. Marston, gravely. By-and-by you shall tell me exactly when that was. Now, about Olivia. Stick to your subject, Miss Pringle. If it isn't her bodily health, what is it? You're not going to tell me she is in love? If so, it must be old De Castro, or Montalba, who is still older, for she sees no one else."

The blind man seemed mightily tickled at the idea, for he did then what he seldom did: he laughed.

"Ah! that's exactly it," struck in Miss Pringle, with alacrity. "You have just hit the right nail on the head, Mr. Marston. She sees no one else! Now, this isn't a natural or a right *state* of things at her age, and with her position and fortune, and so on; she ought to mix. Nothing is so good for

a girl as mixing. Mixing, I may say, does us *all* good; but young people really become brutes and bears when they don't mix—and then they've no chances! Not that *I* think marriage essential to happiness, of course, or I shouldn't have refused all the offers I did: it stands to reason. Only I shouldn't have known whether I really *preferred* remaining single if I hadn't mixed. How should I? Now, Olivia, you must be aware, knows no more of the world than a child unborn. She has actually never been to a ball! She is nearly one-and-twenty, and I don't believe she has ever been in a room with fifty people in her life! It is quite preposterous. The nearest approach to society seems to have been the very confined circle you had at Cintra—and now, here, since she has come, she has declined every invitation, and shut herself up from the very friendly, sociable people you are surrounded by. I really think, Mr. Marston, it is high time you should interfere."

"I can't force the girl to go out if she doesn't like it, Miss Pringle. I don't see that people are a bit happier for gadding about; I'm glad Olivia isn't as restless as some women are, never happy but when they are going somewhere."

"Well, for that matter, I believe Olivia would like a little society as much as any one. You must be aware, Mr. Marston, that it is entirely on *your*

account she declines going out. And I must say, I think her poor dear mother, if she was alive, wouldn't like her being shut up as she is, for I remember that no one enjoyed a ball more than Sarah did when she was a girl, and we both of us had more partners at the county balls than any other girls, and though some said that I was lighter than Sarah, yet——"

"There—there, Miss Pringle, say no more about it. I have never prevented Olivia's going out with her brother where and when she liked; but perhaps you are right. And that I ought to *urge* her going—perhaps you are right. Her mother was too great an invalid ever to go out, so we insensibly fell into these habits of retirement. We get selfish without knowing it," he sighed. "Perhaps you are right. She shall go out of an evening. I'll speak to her about it."

"You mustn't ask her whether she *likes* it, Mr. Marston. She will be sure to say, No. You must tell her you *wish* it, and that it will amuse you to hear all about your neighbours."

"But it won't; and what's more, she wouldn't believe me if I told her so. However, I suppose you are right. I suppose at her age she ought to go out, and," he added as if to himself—"and Sarah would have wished it, perhaps. If it wasn't for the fog—if it wasn't so confoundedly dark in

this country, I—I should go out with her myself, but—but I can't; *Sarah* knows I can't, so Rupert must take care of the child."

My dear Mr. Marston here am I *always* ready, you know, to supply the place of a mother to dear Olivia, and take her out, and give her the advantage of my knowledge of society, for I have mixed so much that I know at once what acquaintance it is desirable for her to make—and it is not every one who *has* the requisite *savoir faire.* Dear Rupert of course knows nothing of such matters. Now, there are the Pomfrets of Caverton Park, evidently quite a superior class of people,—powdered footmen and so on—and most amiable in their manners. I'm sure it was impossible to say more than Mrs. Pomfret did about Olivia yesterday; and I must also add, as was evident, that she took a very great fancy to *me.* The proof of it is, that this very morning comes this invitation to dinner next Wednesday. There couldn't be a better opportunity for Olivia's introduction. Mrs. Pomfret herself told me their dinners were very select."

"Provided they give you enough to eat, they might leave their selection to you," observed the old gentleman, grimly. "You had better sit down and accept it, and then that will obviate all discussion on the matter. I hate discussions."

Miss Pringle was quite delighted with the success of her stroke of finesse. She rose, saying:

"I will go and do so at once. There is a note, I see, for Rupert, but that he will of course answer for himself."

CHAPTER V.

AVANT, PENDANT, ET APRÈS.

Not until the answer was despatched was Olivia told of the invitation.

"I should be much happier spending the evening with you, father. I don't want to go to these people's house a bit. I scarcely know them. Let Rupert escort Aunt Clo, and let me remain at home. I can't bear your being left by yourself."

"God bless my soul! If a man of seventy-five can't be by himself for two or three hours he must be a poor creature, or have a very bad conscience, Olivia. I wish you'd get rid of that idea that I always must have some one with me. If you'd only get better coals and candles—that's all I ask. You do keep these rooms so confoundedly

dark it is as much as one can do to find the way to one's mouth."

"Dear father," said his daughter, looking at him with loving eyes, and shaking her head sadly, in her consciousness that he could not see her, "you must find it very dark, I'm sure; and that is why your children, who are young and strong, don't like to leave you; not that you cannot stand solitude, father, better than any one—not that—oh, no."

She stooped down, and kissed his forehead; but he only suffered this little approach to sentiment under protest.

"There—there—that will do now. Where's the paper? You didn't finish it, did you? You read the City article, and about the fire at Leeds—awful, to be sure! A terrible calamity!—any other news?"

"Well, here is a paragraph entitled 'A Strange Visitor. The little town of —— was thrown into a state of commotion on Saturday last by the appearance of a bear at large in the streets. The inhabitants, it may be imagined, fled in all directions, and it was not without considerable difficulty and peril that the unwelcome stranger was captured. This was effected at last, by some one from a first-floor window flinging a net over Bruin, and, during his efforts to disentangle him-

self, the chain which he had broken was made once more secure around his neck. It appears that an enterprising hairdresser had made this singular purchase the previous day from a travelling menagerie overstocked with bears, meaning to kill and extract the grease from this inhabitant of the Polar regions. As may be surmised, the inhabitants of ——, taking the law into their own hands, insisted upon the hairdresser's at once fulfilling his intentions, and Bruin was despatched without further loss of time.' "

"Horrible! What a predicament—meeting a bear, in a *cul-de-sac*, we'll say, without a chance of escape! If one clambered up a water-pipe, why the bear would come after one, and of course nobody would open a door or a window to let one in. No one was killed, then?"

"No, apparently not; but here is a garotte robbery, in which the sufferer has been fearfully wounded. 'On Tuesday night last, as a gentleman named Hilman was walking down Baker-street, at eleven o'clock, he was met by——' "

"Olivia, my dear!" cries Miss Pringle, entering the room in a fume, "do come and give me your advice. I am terribly put out. That stupid creature of mine has been and mistaken the order I gave her so *distinctly*, and trimmed my——"

"Well?" said Mr. Marston, impatiently, "go on; what was he met by?"

"My new green satin gown——"

"*What?*" he inquired again, yet more impatiently.

"With black instead of white lace!" screamed Aunt Clo. "And it's *cut*—that is the worst of it—all round the *neck, and the arms too*—oh, it's abominable!"

"What the deuce is your aunt talking about? Who is it that is cut round the neck, and the arms, too? I wish people would speak distinctly. The robber couldn't have had time to maim him in that way, in the street."

Olivia laughed heartily.

"It's my aunt's dress she is talking of."

"Oh, confound her dress," he muttered to himself.

"Isn't it provoking?" continued Miss Pringle, too much absorbed in her woe to think of joking. "And I had made up my mind to wear it at the Pomfrets; and now the black is spoilt, for what I wanted it."

"It will look very nice where it is—on the green," observed Olivia.

"Not at all. I look a perfect *fright* in green, without white to relieve it. I'll make her unpick it, every stitch. Servants are the plague of one's

life, that's the truth, Olivia. They're always stupid —always making mistakes. Do come up to my room, my dear, and give me your advice."

"I will come presently, when I have done reading the paper, Aunt Clo."

Then, as Mr. Marston heard the door close behind his irritated sister-in-law, he murmured:

"Foolish woman! I say, Olivia, when you go to balls and dinners, don't let them turn your head, girl, and stuff it full of finery and nonsense. Else, may be, you had better have stayed at home."

The Wednesday came: and witnessed that event which, by the force of a strong will, Miss Pringle had brought about. Olivia Marston was present, for the first time in her life, at an English dinner-party. And, contrary to her own expectations, she was amused. Her right-hand neighbour, Mr. Lionel Pomfret (who had taken her in, by Mrs. Pomfret's dexterous arrangement), did not, indeed, address a single syllable to her during dinner; and as Olivia was not accustomed to try and *make* conversation to young men, she resigned herself, without any compunction, to the pleasant neighbour who sat on her other side. The heir of the house of Pomfret was small, and sickly-looking, with neat, mean features, an unwholesome colour, and a glass in his eye. His very thin hair was gummed tight to his head, and his dimunitive

moustaches gummed straight on end, away from his face. He wore a very elaborate shirt, with large pearl studs; and in the society of ladies, at least—as may have been inferred from his mother's and sisters' conversation—he had not a word to say. It was reported by his friends that there were certain exceptions to this rule; but if so, the exceptions did not fall in that circle of society which Mrs. Pomfret cultivated; and this was perhaps quite as well. Olivia's left-hand neighbour was Julian Westbrook. Mrs. Pomfret viewed the arrangement by which her nephew got next Miss Marston with vexation, and now that she saw Olivia's attention monopolised, it went far to spoil the pleasure of the evening for the good lady. She began to regret that she had asked Julian to come. But then he was such an addition on these occasions that it was felt to be dull when he did not come; and his aunt could never withstand the pleasure of securing her handsome, fashionable nephew, who had more invitations than he could possibly accept, and who indulged his aunt's weakness, by retailing the gossip of circles beyond her reach. He was far too knowing to try and entertain Olivia with such idle talk. He talked, as well informed men of the world do, upon a variety of topics, with equal facility. He ıd considerable taste for painting and music (of

the modern schools—he honestly confessed that he hated all that was "classical," in either art); he had travelled a good deal; he had at least dabbled in all sorts of books; and finally, he possessed that aptness in conveying to others a vivid impression of what he had heard, seen, and read, which is essential to pleasantness. If the greater part of those ladies, however, who had sat beside Julian at dinners that season had listened to his conversation with Olivia, they would have been surprised. He was a many-sided man.

The annoyance Mrs. Pomfret naturally felt at seeing her son so completely eclipsed where she wished him to shine was counterbalanced, in some measure, by watching how very nicely Kate and Rupert Marston were getting on upon the opposite side. Before the second course was off the table the fond mother had arranged it all in her own mind, and was calculating what it was likely that Mr. Marston would allow his son. Sir James Yellowly, the East India Director, who sat beside her, found that his remarks fell upon inattentive ears; but being a good-natured man, and knowing that Lady Yellowly herself was always sadly preoccupied during the solemn banquets which they periodically gave in Harley-street, he bore no resentment; but devoted himself chiefly to Miss Pringle, who, indeed, as we know, required no

encouragement to talk with enough volubility for two.

There was another point upon which Mrs. Pomfret's mind was not quite at rest during dinner. Indeed when she turned her eyes in the direction of a rigid elderly young lady who sat at the further end of the table, on Mr. Pomfret's left hand, the thoughts of the hostess became harrowed by the cruel suspicion that she had committed a breach of etiquette. On Mr. Pomfret's right sat a plain middle-aged lady, whose husband, Captain Bagshott, was a distinguished sailor. He it was who had handed the rigid elderly young lady to dinner; and apparently he did not find his position beside her quite agreeable. Mrs. Pomfret's arrangements had been all thrown out owing to Lady Yellowly's suddenly having the influenza. At the last moment little Mary—only sixteen—was dressed and sent down to fill the vacant seat at table.

"My dear Miss Pringle," said Mrs. Pomfret, immediately the ladies had retired, while she drew her guest at the same time to a distant corner of the room, "*do* tell me whether I was wrong in sending Mrs. Bagshott out first, before Miss Turkaine? Ought Miss Turkaine to have precedence, as a baronet's daughter? Captain Bagshott, you know, is C.B., and I always imagined that the wives of Companions of the Bath, you know, went

out before baronet's daughters, but I *may* be mistaken—and I should be so distressed to have done what looks so ignorant and stupid. Miss Turkaine stands very much upon her precedence, and I observed that she didn't look at all pleased during dinner."

Miss Pringle racked her brain to recal some analogous case, and how the delicate question had then been decided. She remembered upon one occasion, at Cheltenham, seeing Mrs. Carbuncle taken out before Miss Catherine Weal, who, as everybody knew, was a baronet's daughter; but then Mrs. Carbuncle was niece, by marriage, to the late Earl of Mountgarnet,—which might make a difference. Upon the whole, the case appeared involved in such doubt, and there was so much to be said on both sides, that it was a great relief to Mrs. Pomfret's mind when, upon reference to a peerage, at Miss Pringle's suggestion, the table of precedency gave it triumphantly in her favour.

When the men came up-stairs, Miss Marston was asked to sing or play, and upon her declining, on the score that her musical capacity was small, and only fit for home consumption, Kate sat down to accompany her cousin Julian, whose playing on the French horn was renowned, it appeared. With that happy, careless manner of his, he rose from Miss Marston's side on the sofa, and induced his

long legs to carry him in the direction of the piano, where Kate had been sitting ready for some minutes. Then, out of a rosewood casket, he drew a beautifully finished silver horn. Now, about this instrument there are differences of taste; some persons are dead to the charm of trumpets: but few women, at least, are dead to the charm of a good-looking man exhaling his very soul, apparently, in long-drawn cadences, with grace and gentleman-like propriety. "Mr. Westbrook's playing is so soft!" —"So much feeling!" Those were the phrases one heard passed round the room, from all the pretty lips present. It was hard if so handsome a man, playing with such expression, should not be allowed a few false notes. And, to say the truth, he did not deny himself this luxury, occasionally.

While Julian is playing "Ange si pur" with impassioned pathos, and eyebrows that rise and fall in sympathy with the emotions of each bar, Rupert has sat down by the little quiet school-girl, who is wondering if any one will ever speak to her in her far-off corner of the room. He has found her out, however. Perhaps he wants to talk to her of her sister, who is engaged at the piano? Mrs. Pomfret —has up her mind that this must be the case. ls to elicit much corroboration of this view, r, when she questions little Mary that night, :oom. The girl thinks it was so kind of Mr.

Marston to come and sit by her when she was all alone; and he is so nice, and so handsome, and he talked *so* pleasantly! But it does not appear that sister Kate's name was mentioned between the two.

The little school-girl will think of that evening for a long time. The young man will go away, and forget all about it, the moral of which is that little school-girls had better not be brought down to fill up empty places at dinner.

Lionel, the whole of this evening, was a despair to Mrs. Pomfret. Now was the opportunity, when Olivia was sitting on the sofa, with a place unoccupied beside her, and Julian was busy with his French horn, for Lionel to redeem his character. Finding that no telegraphic signals produced any effect upon her son, his mother took the extreme measure of crossing the room to implore him to "go and be civil" to Miss Marston.

"I can't, ma. She ain't one of my sort. She regularly sews me up."

"'Sews you up!' Nonsense, Lionel. Don't talk in that absurd way—and do have a little more self-confidence, my dear boy. She's a most charming girl, and I'm sure not the least shy. Just look how Julian and she have been talking. Do go and say *something*."

"I haven't got Julian's cheek, ma. He's so

deuced cheeky, he is. And then he has always lots of chaff ready. I haven't any. I like a jolly woman, that'll help a fellow on a bit—not such a swell as that gal is. It's no use, ma—I can't go and talk—I don't know what to say."

With a heavy sigh the maternal Macchiavelli heaved herself away towards Olivia's sofa. She must trust to time and accident, she saw. Yet a judicious word might not be out of place.

"My dear boy," she whispered, sinking into the cushions at Olivia's side, "is so very diffident—does himself so little justice. No one knows the stores of his mind—the refinement of his nature—for he never shows himself as he really is, Miss Marston. And then he is so afraid of not pleasing, of being thought forward and so on, that when he admires any one very much, he is always more silent than ever—remains at a distance, and shows to the worst advantage. It is such a pity, isn't it?"

"Ah! a great pity."

Olivia was listening to "Ange si pur," and thinking of the last time she heard it, at Lisbon, in the "Favorite." She scarcely heard a word of the sibilation Mrs. Pomfret was pouring into her ear.

"Some people have the capacity of making the most of their gifts—like Julian," continued his aunt; "and those people of course *get on* in a way

that poor Lionel, I fear, never will. It is wonderful how Julian has got on! But then *he* has no diffidence to stand in his way—such an advantage. Plays charmingly, doesn't he?—so soft. Some women, however, do not *like* quite so much *à plomb*—they prefer a little *more* diffidence in a man—and indeed there is no doubt that the most valuable qualities are not those which show themselves on the surface, however attractive it may make people in society."

But now "Ange si pur" had come to an end; the last spasm of the eyebrows had subsided; the silver horn dropped amidst a murmur of applause, and Mrs. Pomfret called out,

"That is quite beautiful, my dear Julian, but you mustn't leave off. They've just begun another rubber of whist. Do pray give us something else. What is that beautiful thing we heard the other night at the concert—sung by that pretty woman—don't you remember?"

"'Robert, toi qui j'aime,' mamma," said Kate. "Have you got it arranged, Julian?"

"No," he answered, shortly; "I haven't."

"I wish you'd get it, Julian," said his aunt, "I never heard anything more thrilling than it was, as that Mrs. ——, what was her name? sang it, with such intense passion. You *must* remember, Julian, for you were quite excited while she was

singing. A very pretty woman, and such a voice. I have it ringing in my ears, now."

"It requires a woman's voice to give that song effect," said the horn-player, indifferently. "Here, Kate, let us try the 'Trovatore.' "

"By all means. Elliston was the woman's name, mamma. She is a beginner, I suppose, for I have never seen her name anywhere else. You promised, next time we saw it down for a concert, that you would go."

"Come, Kate, let us begin," said her cousin, impatiently.

As the party from the Cedars were driving home that evening, Miss Pringle was loud in praise of the delightful evening they had passed.

"Nothing could be more agreeable than Sir James Yellowly during dinner—so chatty. And our rubber really quite reminded me of Harrowgate—so very pleasant. Mr. Pomfret is a perfect gentleman, and a very steady nice player, and he complimented me upon my play. We won two rubbers, Olivia. As to that Captain Bagshott, he may be a very gallant officer, but I'm very glad he wasn't my partner, that's all. He revoked twice. I hope you amused yourself, my dear. I pitied you going in with that horrid, *vulgar* eldest son—the only one of the family that is objectionable, eh?" (The fact is, she had overheard Lionel ask

his mother, "Who is that little old party in a yellow wig?" Miss Pringle never could forget this. But for this, she would have warmly encouraged Mrs. Pomfret's maternal scheme, no doubt; as it was, she never could endure his name henceforward.) "However," she continued, "you were not *dependent* on him, I was glad to see. The big man seemed to make himself pleasant, didn't he? But do you like all that trumpeting in a room? I'm not very musical, you know, so I'm no judge. I remember a man once playing a horn or something under my window, and though of course it was gratifying, I thought it a horrid bore; and really in a room, I think it reminds one of being in a stage-coach."

"Mr. Westbrook plays with a great deal of expression," said Olivia; "I liked it so much. It's a pity that he isn't always quite in tune, perhaps."

"*Always?*" said Rupert, laughing. "My dear Olivia, 'the wind bloweth where it listeth' in that man's horn. I don't fancy his look at all, and I think his playing quite as great an infliction as Aunt Clo does."

"I'm not so fastidious as you are about music, fortunately. I believe I can get pleasure out of what isn't first-rate."

"Then the fellow's such a prig. I hate his looks."

"You know nothing *but* his looks, do you? You didn't talk *to* him. If you had, you'd have found him very pleasant, and not at all conceited."

"That's what women always think when a man takes the trouble of being agreeable to them. I never saw a fellow give himself greater airs. Did you notice his manner to his aunt and cousins? Such a cool hand."

"I don't know about that. I didn't shake hands with him," laughed his sister. "I only know that if you'd had Mr. Lionel Pomfret sitting on one side of you at dinner, you'd have been glad to find any one as agreeable as Mr. Westbrook on the other."

"Young Pomfret doesn't look as if he'd set the Thames on fire—but his sisters are niceish girls—the youngest is a pretty little thing. I like the family altogether better than I expected."

Aunt Clo was dozing audibly in a corner of the carriage, or she would not have allowed such tame praise to pass unchallenged.

CHAPTER VI.

ANXIETIES.

RUPERT MARSTON'S anxieties had been allayed upon the subject of Lozados, or, it may be supposed, he would hardly have entered so readily into the humours of the Pomfret entertainment. But his father's old friends, De Castro and Montalba, as well as other Portuguese whom he had consulted, laughed to scorn the idea of the great Lisbon house being in a critical condition. They assured him—and had they not been in business all their lives?—that such reports were not unfrequently set afloat, to serve some particular end. They knew there were "bears" in this case, who were trying to depreciate the market of Portuguese stock. Lozados was no mercantile gambler —no successful man of yesterday, whom a chance

might ruin, as a chance had made. His credit was consolidated by half a century of steadfast respectability, by the uprightness of his dealings, the shrewdness of his intellect, and, above all, by his abstinence from all speculation. Rupert was only too glad to believe that the warnings of Mr. Claxton and other English friends had no other foundation than the wise general principle, that an excessive rate of interest paid upon capital indicates a corresponding amount of insecurity. As he could not bring his father to admit this, he wisely put the subject away from his mind as much as possible.

The intimacy between the Pomfrets and Mr. Marston's family ripened in a way that was not foreseen or sought, and could scarcely be accounted for by Olivia and her brother. The strong will of the mother on the one side, who lost no opportunity of cultivating this intimacy, and the readiness of the aunt to embrace such, on the other, were the two motive powers that brought about this result. Upon some pretext or other no three days elapsed without an interchange of notes, a visit, a walk together, a party made up to some exhibition in London, an evening spent at the Park, or one of the few favoured houses in the neighbourhood which Mrs. Pomfret patronised. It followed that Olivia saw very much more than part of their new friends. Except in the case

of their evening meetings, which with all Mrs. Pomfret's best endeavours could only be occasional, the young man of business was of course absent. The flame which the anxious mother flattered herself was lit that first evening did not burn as vigorously as could be wished; yet, Heaven knows, it was not for want of fanning. Rupert accepted their invitations, and went with them to the opera. He talked and laughed with Kate, as in duty bound; indeed, he thought her a very nice girl; but he went no further. He was not the least bit in love, though poor Mrs. Pomfret still tried hard to persuade herself that this was the case. Unfortunately there was another heart concerned in the matter, which anxious mammas in like circumstances are apt to forget. Kate was not yet a *blasée* young lady; she had been out a couple of years, but had seen few men in any degree of intimacy. This young and good-looking man, she was now, for three or four months, seeing very often. It was small wonder that though Rupert's attitude remained unchanged, the girl was gradually falling in love, or fancying herself so, which, for the time being, at all events, came to the same thing. Foolish Mrs. Pomfret!

Towards Olivia, therefore, from different motives, the feelings of both mother and daughter were drawn. They neither of them relaxed their efforts

to win her friendship; and to such a measure of that sentiment as springs from gratitude for kindness they attained. She felt, indeed, a lively desire to respond to their warm demonstrations of affection. The circle of her friends had hitherto been so limited, especially among women, that she could not remain untouched by the efforts of mother and daughter to break through the cold ground of acquaintance, and draw closer to her. Most people with any power of attraction about them have known what it was to meet with some enthusiastic admirer, who by the sheer strength with which he fastens and holds on to their friendship, leaves them without the power to shake him away. This was pretty much the case with Olivia and her new friends. Kate was very commonplace, but she was a blind worshipper of Olivia's, partly, no doubt, in consequence of Rupert. Mrs. Pomfret's was even a more genuine admiration. Quite apart from the insane idea which possessed her of forcing a wife upon her son, and the many advantages which Miss Marston united for the part of daughter-in-law, the elder lady had that perception of Olivia's character, which a lower nature, coming in contact with a higher one, occasionally obtains. There was no one point of resemblance between them; but this, though it render sympathy difficult on Olivia's part,

was certainly an additional attraction in Mrs. Pomfret's eyes. She was so far removed from a dull woman that she knew her own shortcomings, and could appreciate qualities to which she was unaccustomed. Olivia's simplicity and unworldliness, her unselfishness, and the absence in her of all pretension, all effort to attract admiration, were great charms in Mrs. Pomfret's eyes.

"That girl will be the making of Lionel," said the worthy mother one night to her husband. "She is a true lady, Pomfret; that is what Olivia Marston is, and what Lionel *wants*, to draw him out properly. Mark my words, he will be a different man when they've been married a year."

"But, my dear, it seems to me—eh?—that he doesn't fancy the girl. He doesn't speak half a dozen words to her when she is here, and I don't think ever calls there. You know best, my dear, I dare say; but it does seem to me that there is no chance of this coming to pass, at present, a bit more than there was of his marrying Miss Wilde last year, or Miss——"

"Oh, Pomfret, don't revert to that, please. I'm quite ashamed of myself when I think of my having wanted him to marry that girl. It was all my horrid worldliness; there was nothing but her connection to recommend her. This is a *very* different case. The man who gets Olivia Marston, I

don't care who he is, if he's a duke's *eldest son*, Pomfret, he is a lucky man. And I don't despair. She is getting accustomed to us now, and there's nothing like a girl getting to know a man's family well. She knows what she has got to look to. I confess it will require management, Pomfret—a good deal of management—but *that*, you know, I'm accustomed to. And for my dear boy, I do feel it *is* a prize worth trying for."

"If I were to offer an opinion," said Mr. Pomfret, hesitatingly, and, as usual, with great deference to his better half, "it would be that Lionel has no chance—even if he were to try, which he doesn't—as long as Julian is always here. You shouldn't ask him quite so often, if you want to get Lionel to talk to the girl, my dear. It's no business of mine, of course; I merely offer an opinion. But it seems to me that Miss Marston finds Julian a very agreeable fellow, as, indeed, he is; but it isn't your boy's game, that's all."

"Well, Pomfret, Julian is *your* nephew, remember, and has been brought up like one of ourselves here. He has always come down whenever he likes, and I don't see how I can stop his visits suddenly. Besides, my dear, with all his faults (and I know he is horridly selfish and a *mauvais soojet*), Julian is immensely useful, and I shouldn't like to throw him over quite. But I told Olivia

Marston at the very first, and I have repeated it constantly since, that Julian isn't a marrying man. I told her about that affair two years ago, and how many other scrapes he had been in altogether; in short, I thought it right to *open her eyes* about him. Olivia is a *very* superior girl. I'm not afraid of her falling in love with him. She likes him very well to talk to, and that is all, depend on it."

"Oh, my dear, I dare say you're right," said Mr. Pomfret, as he turned round and fell asleep.

This, then, was the state of things at the end of three months from the day Miss Marston first dined at Caverton Park. How far Mrs. Pomfret was justified in the interpretation we have just heard her give of the young lady's feelings towards Julian Westbrook will be seen presently.

Rupert found himself in the same railway-carriage with Lionel and two of his choice companions, one evening, on his way from town. The young men were discussing Julian, by no means a favourite with any of them, when Rupert entered the carriage.

"Such a chap for women! always in a mess with one or other. He went on like anything last year with a gal at Brighton, and then walked off as cool. D'you remember, too, that little actress he was so sweet on, two years ago? By Jove!

that was near being a pretty kettle of fish. He was awfully spoony."

"But she was married!"

"That was what saved him, man! Why, bless you, you didn't think Julian was over particular about the seventh commandment, did you? Bill says that he was very near having to fight a duel at Baden last year about a Rooshian princess. *I* can't think what the women see about him, for my part, only he's such a lot of brass."

That was pretty much Rupert's unexpressed opinion, too. His bile rose whenever he found himself in this man's company. He could be lenient—knowing his own weakness, how could he be otherwise?—to the follies of passion; but to the systematic vice and heartless trifling, begotten of vanity alone, he was utterly pitiless.

It is a June morning. At the Cedars breakfast is just over, and Olivia comes out upon the terrace looking as fresh in her muslin dress as the rose she stoops to gather. Then she looks out to the river between the black arms of the Cedars, and now to the pea-green fields beyond, where the buttercups shine like specks of gold in the glittering sunlight, and nature stares out as hard and vividly brilliant as the crudest pre-Raphaelite picture.

Suddenly, between those fields and her, the sharp prow of a boat is seen parting the swift-

flowing waters of the river. Then the single figure in this "out-rigger" becomes visible, plying a long, slow, vigorous stroke, that sends the foam-flakes flying from his oar. And then, by a neatly-executed manœuvre, the boat, obeying the hand of its master, runs into a little creek at the foot of the Cedars garden. Olivia has recognised the boat and its occupant. He has more than once paid visits thus, whereby the village and neighbourhood have lost the opportunity of discussing *why* Mr. Westbrook's horse should be seen so often turning in at the gate of the Cedars. Never before, however, has he called so early. Olivia wonders what has brought him at this hour, and remembers, with some annoyance, that Rupert, whose prejudice against Westbrook is still great, has been detained an hour later than usual, and is still in the house. The tall, strong figure of the rower, a loose jacket thrown over his striped jersey, his face and hands tanned already many degrees browner than when we saw him in the spring, comes with its long indolent gait swinging up across the lawn towards the terrace where Olivia stands. She does not call her aunt or retire, as most properly bred young ladies would think it necessary to do. She simply sits down.

"I am an early visitor, Miss Marston; excuse me. I am rowing part of the way up to Windsor,

and stopped to ask you a question on the way. The Guards have a ball there next week. Will you go, if I get you and your aunt an invitation? I am sure I can manage it, and I think you would be amused. Do say 'Yes.'"

Olivia shook her head and smiled.

"Such dissipations are quite out of my line. Do you know, I have never been to a ball."

"So much the better. Make a beginning now, then."

"The quiet old house wouldn't know what to make of it if I were to be away all night. No, you mustn't tempt me."

"But why not? Surely you don't want to lead this monastic life for ever? Your father can't object, I'm sure."

"Bless me, Mr. Westbrook!" exclaimed Aunt Clo, suddenly coming out from the drawing-room, with her knitting in her hand, "who'd have thought of seeing you? Well, this *is* an unexpected pleasure! I heard voices, and thought I'd just see who it was. Dear me! what a heat you're in. Have you asked Mr. Westbrook if he would take anything, Olivia?"

"Nothing," said Julian, quickly, before Olivia could reply; "I only came to offer you and Miss Marston tickets for the Guards' ball at Windsor next week. Several of them are great friends of

mine, and I know I could get tickets; but your niece declines."

"*Declines!*" cried Miss Pringle. "Gracious goodness, Olivia, why on earth should you decline Mr. Westbrook's very civil offer? I'm sure, when I was a girl, I should have jumped at it; and, indeed, though I no longer dance (I have given it up for the last year or two, though people told me there was no *necessity* for it), still, I confess, I should enjoy going to the ball vastly."

"Well, dear aunt, you can go," said Olivia, with a sly smile at the corners of her mouth, as she glanced towards Julian. "There is nothing to prevent you, that I know of, if Mr. Westbrook procures you the invitation. By-the-by," she added, "of course I need not ask if the Pomfrets are going. Kate enjoys a ball so much."

"Well," said Westbrook, colouring slightly, "at present I haven't asked for invitations for them; but if you go, I'll try and manage to get tickets for my aunt and Kate. As to Lionel, of course it is out of the question."

"Mr. Westbrook, you ought to get your aunt and cousin tickets *before* any one else. As to myself——"

"Don't be absurd!" struck in Aunt Clo. "I shall tell your papa, Olivia, and then you will be *made* to accept, as you were about the opera,

which I am sure we enjoyed vastly, Mr. Westbrook, thanks to you. Why, when your papa is in bed and asleep, child, what is there to prevent your being at a ball?"

Olivia hesitated a moment.

"I don't know what Rupert may think about it; I could not accept without consulting him. Will there be an invitation for my brother also, Mr. Westbrook?"

"I am almost afraid not. I will manage it if I can; but men's invitations are more difficult to get, as you can understand."

"At all events," she said, in her quick, decisive way, "I am quite resolved upon one point. I cannot think of accepting this invitation at your hands until the Pomfrets have been invited first. I will speak to Rupert in the meantime."

Westbrook did not relish this ultimatum, and Aunt Clo tried to overrule it, but Olivia was firm. Promising to call the following day, the young man shook hands with both ladies, and trailed lazily back across the lawn towards his boat. The next moment Rupert came out upon the terrace. Aunt Clo began with volubility to explain the object of Westbrook's early visit. But the brother, drawing his sister's hand within his arm, walked slowly away down the terrace-walk, without reply-

ing to Aunt Clo's eager demand for his approval of the ball project.

"I don't like that fellow's coming here so much, Olivia."

"You hear what it was brought him now?—to offer to get us tickets for the Guards' ball at Windsor."

"You did not accept, I hope?" he said, sharply.

"Well, no; I said I would speak to you. My father, I know, will urge my going, if Aunt Clo speaks to *him* about it. Of course I shouldn't go unless you had an invitation, and would go too."

"Then you may be very sure I shall not do that, on any invitation of Westbrook's."

"Why not?" asked Olivia, colouring.

"Why not! Because I hate the fellow. I haven't the least objection to the ball itself. If you can get an invitation by any other means, you shall go; but I have every objection to your owing your invitation to that fellow—to your being seen much with him—to your putting yourself under any sort of obligation to him. I think it would be a disadvantage to you, Olivia, for it to be said that he was paying you attention. He has done so to heaps of other girls, and I don't choose you to be cast in with the lot of those he has flirted and amused himself with, and forgotten—though even *that* I should think a less misfortune, almost, than

your marrying him, if there was the least chance of such a thing."

"There is no such chance," said Olivia, impatiently; "but why are you so prejudiced? It is unworthy of you, Rupert."

"Because, I tell you, I have a bad opinion of him."

"But *why?* You go on repeating those vague rumours—do you absolutely *know* the truth of any of them? I hate stabbing in the dark."

"His reputation is well known. Besides, any one with any knowledge of the world can see what sort of man he is."

"*I* have *no* knowledge of the world. Of course I can see that he has had much to spoil him, but I think there is a great deal of good in him, nevertheless. He seems so susceptible to good influence. I fancy he has never known what it was to be really attached to any one yet."

"And therefore you think there are excuses to be made for him? If you judged quite dispassionately, Olivia, you would not think so. The man will never be really attached to any woman—it isn't in him. He's vain and selfish, and he has made many a woman miserable by his good looks and his plausible smooth tongue. I have made it my business to inquire about him, and I have learnt quite enough to justify the antipathy I felt towards

him from the very first. I know the sort of man so well!" he added vehemently, digging the end of his stick, as he spoke, into the lawn on which they were walking.

"His aunt spares no pains to let one know her nephew's shortcomings, but as she always contrasts them with her son's perfections, I don't pay much attention to her. Mrs. Pomfret is a very good woman, and I am sensible of all her kindness to me — but upon some subjects she is quite demented."

Olivia said this, because she was confident that it was from Mrs. Pomfret that Rupert had heard so much to Westbrook's disadvantage; and because she felt resentful of this particular mode of pushing her son's interest, which the good lady was disposed to employ.

"I don't listen to women's gossip," replied Marston, disdainfully. "A man's character is generally judged pretty fairly by his fellow men. Westbrook has few staunch *friends*—he has plenty of intimate acquaintances. He is looked upon as very good company—light in hand, agreeable, a thorough man of the world. No human being would ever think of sending for him in sickness, or applying to him in any strait whatever; and though I have met with many men who said they 'liked' him, I have never met one who deluded

himself into the belief that if he were
morrow, Westbrook would care one straw

"I think you are wrong, Rupert,—I
are quite wrong as to his having no fee
turned his sister, warmly. "From all I
heard him say——"

"Ay—that's it. He *talks* sentiment b
doesn't he? Give me a man's actions to
by. This fellow, Olivia, is quite unwort
Take care what you are about. Take c
it is too late—and you make yourself
father and me miserable."

She checked the words which rose to
and was silent for a moment or two.
raised her face to his, and kissed him.

"Your anxiety about me makes you
everything, dear boy. There is no dang
coming to pass. I'm not vain enough
because Mr. Westbrook has paid me a li
tion, that I am the one favoured woman
at last secured the affections of this ve
gentleman. Your fears are quite prematu

"That may be—I hope it is so—but th
alter the case. You like him—you don't
You won't believe a word against him. W
say that while this fellow 'means nothin
phrase goes,—while he thinks it fine fo
amusing himself with a girl who knows

…, from the large shining leaves: and,
…ngaged, she heard the shrubbery gate
…d the sound of a horse's hoofs upon the
… behind her. She did not turn round,
… knew at once who it was; but it
…ate to retreat. By the time she had
…ng up the rose, Westbrook was close

…ortunate to have found you, at last," he
… have called twice lately, and almost
…think you never meant to admit me
…owever, this wet day, I thought you
…y get farther than your garden."
… start in the rain?" she said; "I am
… must have got wet."
…mer had something of its old shyness:
… uncomfortable: it seemed so inhuman
… him in, after his wet ride!
… got a little wet, but nothing to signify.
… by finding you." There was a pause;
… said, "I will take my horse round to
… I may?"
…ured: and, for a moment, knew not
…y. "If you will go in, you will find
… Perhaps you will have a glass of

…d out a piece of wire from her basket,
… to busy herself again with her rose-

tree. He looked keenly at her: then he replied, in his careless off-hand way,

"No, if you are going to remain out here, I'll——"

"I am going into the village as soon as I have done tying up this rose," she said quickly, her face still turned away.

There was no mistaking this. He was too gentlemanlike to insist further—and not to show that he understood her hint. He had recourse to what is so invaluable in such emergencies—he sighed deeply.

She had finished fastening up the tree now; and, more by way of something to do, in this awkward silence, than for any other reason, she cut off three or four roses, and put them into her basket. She felt so sorry for him:—it was very distressing—but what could she say? It was more honest to let him, at once, know the footing on which he must be, henceforward.

Westbrook looked very much annoyed; but he was equal to the emergency. With nineteen-twentieths of his women-acquaintances he would have masked his annoyance, and made a careless remark or two upon some indifferent topic. But this was not the game to be played with Olivia. He remained silent, until she turned towards him. He was leaning against the saddle, with the bridle

my account, remember, or I shall be very angry —not but what balls are poor amusements, I think—a parcel of foolish boys and girls jumping about; but if it amuses you——"

"No, dear father, I have decided not to go." And Olivia glanced up at her brother. "I assure you my decision has nothing to do with you, but under the circumstances I know I should not enjoy the ball."

Mr. Marston did not further press the point, and the subject dropped. A minute after, Rupert kissed his sister, as they reached the steps of the terrace, and hurried through the house on his way to town.

An hour or two later, when the day's *Times* had been read, and the journal written, Olivia came out once more upon the terrace steps, with a blotting-case in her hand, and drawing a chair towards her little table, she sat for some minutes with her elbows on her knees, turning over in her mind how she could best express that which she had to say. A soft summer breeze from the river wafted up to her the sweet breath of honeysuckle, and jasmine, and clove pinks that grew under the wall. From their dove-cote, in the big elm, whose leaves were flickering in the light wind and sunshine, her doves were cooing their low monotonous measure, so full of pleasantness and peace. Olivia

laid her pen down, and let herself drift upon a stream of thought.

What was her real feeling towards Julian Westbrook? How far had her liking for his society carried her? In spite of what she had said to her brother, she was not quite sure herself upon these points. Sometimes she almost thought—she half feared—that she was a little in love. Her imagination was dazzled—her heart *bewildered* by the devotion of the first very attractive man it had fallen into her lot to meet. Her powers of comparison, be it remembered, were reduced to the narrowest compass by the singularly isolated life she had led. She could not gauge him by other men; she only knew that he was infinitely the pleasantest person she had ever seen much of. With all her love for Rupert, Olivia was aware that he was often prejudiced. He loathed "a fine gentleman;" and Westbrook's cool, free and easy manners had predisposed Rupert to believe the evil he had heard of him. This Olivia felt: and demurred in consequence, at accepting, as true, all her brother said to Julian's disadvantage. Yet he had spoken positively; and he knew life, which she did not.

But on one point she had no hesitation. She remained firm in her resolution to discourage Westbrook's further advances. Indeed, circum-

stanced as she was, she had scarcely a choice in the matter, it seemed to her. Her love for her brother was, after her devotion to her father, the next strongest passion in her heart. This she never doubted. Whatever her feeling towards Westbrook might ripen into, if fostered, it had not yet mastered those early affections, which had grown with her growth, and had been all in all to her, hitherto. Since Rupert was so dead set against him, Westbrook's intimacy with her should cease. For the present, at all events, she must see as little of him as possible. For Westbrook's sake, this was but right; and it was wise for her own. Who could tell but that, by and by, Rupert might change or modify his opinion of this man's falsity and wickedness? And *then*, why, if so perhaps——

What she at last wrote ran thus:

"Dear Mr. Westbrook,—In order to save time, as well as to prevent your having the trouble of calling here to-morrow, I write to say that I find it is not in my power to accept the invitation you were kind enough to offer to procure for me, so you must think no more about it. Do not think me impertinent, however, if I express a hope that you will exert the same interest to secure your aunt and cousin invitations

that you kindly proposed using for me. They would justly feel hurt otherwise.

"I remain, dear Mr. Westbrook,

"Very truly yours,

"OLIVIA MARSTON."

In spite of this, Julian Westbrook called at the Cedars next day. He was not admitted. The following morning Olivia received these lines:

"DEAR MISS MARSTON,—I am sorry your brother should have prevented your accepting the invitation which it would have given me great pleasure to have procured for you. As your absence will rob the ball of its only attraction to *me*, I shall not go. You will understand, therefore, that it would be impossible for me to ask for invitations for my relations when I shall not be there to present them, in person. Trusting that I may be fortunate enough to find you at home some day this week, believe me to be very sincerely yours,

"JULIAN WESTBROOK."

Had Rupert seen this note, he would not have failed to detect one thing which, not unnaturally, escaped Olivia. The thing to be detected, and which all Julian's astuteness would not have

hidden from Rupert, was this: that, whereas Westbrook would have liked the *éclat* of introducing a handsome distinguished-looking girl to his fine Guardsmen friends, he shrank from being seen with rather a vulgar-looking aunt, and very ordinary first cousin.

But, for all that, Rupert was wrong in his estimate of Julian's character—wrong, at least, in one respect. He was capable of a strong, if selfish, passion: and Olivia Marston had aroused this, in a measure which surprised the *blasé* man of the world himself.

"Miss Marston, what *have* you heard? Tell me frankly. Do not judge me too harshly before you hear my defence."

"How can I judge you at all? What can a girl know about a man's life? She has nothing but her instinct to guide her as to his character, or the truth of anything she hears about him."

"Shall I say that her instinct is always right, or that it is apt to mislead her?" thought Julian. He could not make up his mind, so he cast that aside, and said—

"A man is often unjustly taxed with things which it was impossible he could avoid—which the force of circumstances have drawn him into. He is thrown, let us say, into close intimacy with a girl, about whom, at first, he conceives a very erroneous impression. On knowing more of her, he sees that she is the last person to make him happy—that they are quite unsuited to each other. The world instantly raises an outcry against him: calls him a flirt—a male jilt—all sorts of ugly names; when, really, he has been guilty of nothing worse than a want of due caution—for how *can* a man know anything of a girl until he talks to her?"

"You know how to put things very cleverly, Mr. Westbrook," replied Olivia, with a half-smile, half-frown. "You ought to be a lawyer; I can't

argue with you; still, I know that though there may be some truth in what you say, it is not the whole truth. But, indeed, I had rather not discuss the subject. I'm sure I don't want to judge any one. The only impartial judge of any action in this life, I think, is one's own conscience—one's own standard of right and wrong."

"Exactly, and your standard is perhaps not precisely that of a man of the world."

How distinctly she remembered those words long afterwards, together with the whole scene: the dim green light; the trickling of the water through shells, and the soft plash into its basin; the perfumed breath of orange-flowers; and the handsome face bent over her!

"Women, you see, substitute Conscience for Honour," he said, again.

"And not a bad substitute, either," she replied.

"Perhaps so—for them. But depend on it, that in many cases where there is a loud outcry against evil-doers, if you could know all the circumstances——"

"Ah, you always return to *circumstances*."

"Because women, being exposed to so many fewer temptations than we are, are apt to judge us uncharitably."

"Where is the boasted superiority of men, if they are not stronger to resist temptation? Why

should there be a separate code for men and for women? I am no champion of my sex. I believe that men were meant to be our superiors in all ways. If they are good men, I am sure they are so. But when you speak of women being uncharitable, I want to know why we are to be lenient to the shortcomings of those who ought to be stronger, instead of weaker, than ourselves?"

She spoke impetuously. He was not quite prepared to answer her.

"Upon my word, that is one of those sort of questions that—that is rather difficult to discuss with you," he began.

She took up his words at once.

"We won't discuss it, please. I do want to say one thing, and then we will dismiss the subject. It is this. My only heroes are those who, having a high standard of right, strive to act up to it: not those, however gifted, who yield themselves slaves to every passing inclination of the moment. These men may have *excuses* made for their conduct, but the heroes before whom I am inclined to bow will never require such."

It was strange language from a girl; and the way in which she uttered it made a deep impression on Westbrook. He could not choose, but take the application of those words as meant for himself. She was in another frame of mind from that which

prompted her to palliate Westbrook's reported conduct when speaking to her brother; or rather the difference was, that she was speaking to the man himself—a man whom she liked, and whom she was conscious, if all was true, she could not respect—and not of him to another. She had spoken words which should show him there was a gulf fixed between them. Those words were the simple truth. However much she might like, and try to defend, a man whose character was assailed, she would never permit that liking to grow into a stronger feeling—indeed she felt that she could never give her whole heart to him unless he would stand up boldly, and disprove by his life the calumny of his assailants. If this man had real stuff in him, out of which better things than fell into a career of selfish indulgence might come, the words she had uttered might possibly rouse him.

And he understood her. That hour might be the turning point in his life. The *blasé* man of the world had never felt for any woman as he felt for this girl. He was accustomed to facile conquest, and the quiet fearlessness with which she defied him, while it irritated, had a charm for him, such as the flattering smiles of other women had never possessed. He was in danger, for the first time in his life, of forgetting *himself* in the object of his pursuit. A dim image of a possibly better life

arose before him, and he felt that if he could, by any means, throw a plank across the gulf to which Olivia had pointed, he would burn his ships behind him, he would sacrifice everything which he had hitherto most prized; his independence, his popularity, his luxurious habits—everything.

A minute—but one minute, more, and he would have spoken. No matter what now: for that golden moment was lost, never to return again. Mrs. Pomfret, in a fluster of lace, came hurrying through the library door, and espying the fugitives, of whom she was in chase, exclaimed,

"Oh! here you are!—Julian, they're wanting you to dance. There's Miss Mills just waiting for you to make up a set.—No, you mustn't carry off Miss Marston, Julian, no! I've something particular to say to her. There, now, get up, and go and dance, and I'll take your seat. Miss Marston, you won't mind giving up the dance, will you?"

Julian Westbrook was a man with a strong will of his own, but he knew, by experience, that there were certain cases in which any one who ventured to combat with Aunt Pomfret was sure to be worsted. He saw that she was resolved to oust him from his position; and he yielded it, with a bad grace enough. It is unnecessary to say that he had not the remotest intention of condescending to dance with Miss Mills. He went into the door-

way, and stared superciliously on at the quadrille, resolved to return to Olivia when it was over.

"My dear Miss Marston—my dear Olivia, if you will let me call you so, I have something very particular, very particular *indeed*, to say to you; and you must excuse me, my dear, if I'm rather abrupt, for it is a delicate matter to deal with, and one requiring a good deal more *art* than I possess, to clothe it in all its poetry and eloquence. But I am a plain-spoken woman, as you know, my dear, and not accustomed to varnish what I have to say. It's about Lionel, poor dear boy! You must have observed, you cannot *fail* to have observed, how very dispirited he has been of late—how much he has avoided you, and how very strange and odd his manner has been?"

"Yes," replied Olivia, scarcely repressing a smile, "I have remarked that."

"Well, my dear Olivia, it's very flattering to you. He regards you as so infinitely above him in every way, that it is perfectly hopeless his even *thinking* of you. 'It were all one that he should love some bright particular star'—that sort of thing. I tried to argue him out of this state some time since, but in vain. Since then, his father and I have reason to fear that he has endeavoured to distract his thoughts by paying attention to a girl every way his inferior, and whom we never,

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tiality for me has misled you. It is possible you might persuade your son into marrying me, but do you think that a marriage without love on either side, without a taste or a sentiment in common, can be happy? Be assured that it would only make us both miserable. Please say no more about it, dear Mrs. Pomfret. I feel your kindness in wishing to have me for a daughter-in-law, but it's quite impossible that this should be. Don't let us renew the subject."

"There is one thing I *must* say to you, Olivia," —and Mrs. Pomfret wiped the corners of her eyes with her worked handkerchief,—"there is one thing I must say very solemnly and seriously to you. If the cause of your refusing my son is the attention that you are receiving from Julian, you are doing a very *foolish* thing. Lionel mayn't be a brilliant, fascinating man of society, like his cousin, but I'm sure he never *jilted* a girl—never trifled with a girl's feelings in his *life*. He is only too soft, and too *shy* with women, and you must remember that the shiest men make the best husbands. I don't mind telling *you* that he will have some day a clear eighteen thousand a year, and *that* isn't to be picked up every day. As to Julian, I feel, of course, a certain hesitation in speaking about my husband's sister's son, who has always been so much with us, and who, indeed, is always

welcome here, for he is a most agreeable creature to have in the house, but——"

"You need say no more, dear Mrs. Pomfret, than you have already done on this subject," interrupted Olivia, quickly, and with an unconscious tinge of sarcasm. "You are quite mistaken in imagining that your nephew has influenced in any way my refusal of the honour you have done me; consequently it can't concern me to hear what his past conduct has been, and I had rather not do so. Mr. Westbrook and I are never likely to be anything more than we now are to each other. I assure you there is no danger of my swelling the number of his victims—you need not be afraid for me."

She smiled as she spoke, and laid her hand gently upon Mrs. Pomfret's arm, with one of those feminine movements which convey a world of meaning in a very slight action. Westbrook came up at the same moment. The quadrille was over —would Miss Marston dance the next waltz with him? But Olivia was engaged; her partner even now approached to claim her hand. So Julian's opportunity was lost for that evening: and Mrs. Pomfret's edifice of maternal diplomacy crumbled into dust.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CRISIS.

CIRCUMSTANCES ordained that Westbrook and Olivia should not meet again, after that evening, for a very long time to come. Great changes were to take place in the interval: yet so little did Julian foresee anything of the kind that, as he went to bed, he laid out plans for prosecuting the suit which he had only seriously commenced that night. He was not a man easily to be discouraged; he had not a doubt in his own capacity to overcome all Olivia's scruples and win her affection—*if he continued in the same mind.* But he was aware this winning would require time, and more perseverance than he had yet brought to bear on any similar task. Fate, however, it appeared, was against him.

Olivia was alarmed, at an early hour the following morning, by hearing that her father was very ill. She flew to his room, and found him speechless, his face drawn upon one side, his whole appearance in the space of a few hours having undergone a shocking change. He had parted from her the night before, an erect, hale, noble-looking old man; she found him helpless, broken-down, disfigured, his mind and his speech alike affected by the paralysis which had struck him. The best advice from London was telegraphed for, and for days, nay weeks, Mr. Marston's condition was held to be most critical. The doctors did not conceal from Olivia and her brother that a second such attack must in all probability prove fatal. At length, however, after a long interval of anxiety, during which the daughter watched by her father with unremitting care, there was an evident change for the better in the old man's state; the muscles of the face seemed gradually to relax, the tongue was loosed, and the left arm, which had hung helpless, he could now, in a measure, use. The powers of the mind and memory still remained affected; it was painful to see the efforts he made, with his recovered speech, to recal and to discuss past events: and the doctors held out no hope that in this respect he could be again as he had been, before this shock to his system. But even

this much gained was a great deal—a great deal for which that loving daughter thanked God on her bended knees, after watching hour by hour, through the long warm days, and half the short warm nights of June, every varying shade upon the old man's face.

During these weeks she saw no one. Mrs. Pomfret called or sent daily; and it was a very congenial occupation for Aunt Clo (who was of no sort of use, otherwise, just now), to receive visits, to answer notes of inquiry, and to run about among the neighbours, disseminating her little crumbs of news. Julian Westbrook called several times: but as he found that Olivia was invisible, and as he had no particular fancy for a *tête-à-tête* with Miss Pringle, he contented himself with leaving his card.

Who shall say? perhaps it was fortunate that just at this time Olivia Marston's mind was too painfully occupied to give more than a passing thought to him, and that, whether at Caverton Park or at the Cedars, she and Julian were prevented from meeting. She was not in love; but it was not very far from the edge of the precipice which overhangs that fatal gulf that she had resolutely taken her stand, and, with averted eyes, had said, "no further." Julian was a clever fellow in his generation. If he could only have

persuaded her that he was now altogether a changed man—a man whose principle nothing would shake, whose constancy no trial would affect—if he could only have led her, in short, by imperceptible degrees, to the very edge of that precipice, I will not undertake to say that the girl might not have turned giddy. But Fate, while frustrating Westbrook's plans, befriended Olivia. In more ways than one, it will be seen that Mr. Marston's illness proved in the end to be a blessing, rather than the calamity his children naturally considered it.

The Pomfrets' party had taken place in the first week in June. It was the beginning of the second week in July when Mrs. Pomfret called one morning early at the Cedars, and asked to see Miss Marston. Her father's condition had been mending now for the past week, and Olivia had already seen Mrs. Pomfret and her daughter more than once. She had been struck with Kate's looking ill, and with Mrs. Pomfret's appearing dispirited, and was, therefore, in some measure prepared for the announcement which the latter lady was come to make.

"You will be surprised to hear that we are all going abroad, my dear Miss Marston; and probably, I think, for some time. Kate's health has been giving me great anxiety of late, and the

doctors recommend some German waters for her in the first instance, and probably, I think, a warm climate for the winter. Then Lionel, poor boy, sadly requires change of scene. He will accompany us; and I hope may recover his spirits, with new subjects of interest to occupy his mind. Probably my second boy, Harry, will join us in the winter, at Nice or somewhere. He expects to get leave from the West Indies, where he is quartered; so we shall be quite a large party, and I don't think we shall be in a hurry to return. I rather want Mr. Pomfret to sell Caverton."

The objects which the good lady had in view, in the speech above recorded, were various. In the first place, Kate's disappointment, owing to her mother's mistaken conduct, which had led her to fancy that Rupert Marston was in love with her —this was, of course, to be concealed, and a delicate organisation was to be substituted for a temporary derangement of the heart. Kate's common sense made her, at last, see that there was not a shadow of hope that Rupert would ever regard her as other than a pleasant partner—that he would ever hand her down to dinner in preference to any other girl he happened to be near. Slowly and reluctantly, Mrs. Pomfret's eyes had been opened to the same fact.

Another motive in this speech was the endea-

vour (to which she still clung) of making Miss Marston believe that Lionel had suffered much, though in strict silence, because of her; and that the loss of his "spirits" was owing to her unqualified rejection of his hand; the real truth being that Mr. Pomfret and his eldest son had had more than one animated conversation upon the subject of Miss Julia Roper, which had resulted in the elder gentleman's communicating to the lady's father his intention of cutting his son off with a shilling should he persist in marrying contrary to his parents' wishes. This extreme measure, instigated by Mrs. Pomfret, no doubt, was not without its effect. The wily tradesman, finding that he would have a helpless and ignorant son-in-law thrown upon his hands to support, besides the possibility of a large family, thought the honour of being allied to the house of Pomfret would be somewhat dearly bought, and prudently declined it. But in the fear of this desperate Leander swimming over the Hellespont which his parents had provided to obstruct his marriage, it was advisable to remove him from Hero's neighbourhood forthwith. This was really the chief reason for their resolving to go abroad for some months.

It was as well, however, that Olivia should feel all she was losing. We are said never fully to appreciate what we have possessed till this comes

to pass. Therefore Mrs. Pomfret threw in those artistic touches about their lengthened wanderings abroad, and the uncertainty of their returning to Caverton. And then she waited for a reply.

"I think you are so right to go, if Kate's health is likely to be benefited, Mrs. Pomfret. I thought her looking very pale the other day; and you would enjoy a winter abroad. I envy any one going to the South, where my childhood was spent."

"I am sure I wish you could come with us."

"Thank you," said Olivia, with a smile; "my travelling is all over now. I did enough before I was eighteen to last my life. You will find me, in all probability, growing in the same place when you return, without having passed a single night away from the Cedars. I take it for granted that you *will* return to Caverton. I thought you were very fond of it, Mrs. Pomfret? and you have made it so comfortable—so very comfortable. Why should you leave it?"

"Well, there are a good many reasons," replied Mrs. Pomfret, clearing her throat of nothing, and ending with a dry cough; "a good *many* reasons; but I need only mention one—the lamentable want of society. I do not think it is doing our girls justice. Mary will be ready to come out next year, and I should like her to see something of *the*

world. Now, really we have such a wretched set here, that we might as well be living—I don't know where."

"And where do you think of going?"

"London, perhaps—I don't know. Nothing is settled at present. Mr. Pomfret may perhaps take a larger place, more in the country, where we may have *county* society. You will write to me, my dear, won't you, when we are away?"

Olivia shook her head, smiling.

"No, Mrs. Pomfret, you mustn't trust to me. I have never had a correspondent in my life, and I have not the art of writing glib letters about nothing. If there is anything to tell you, I promise to let you hear; but my life is too uneventful, and I am too little accustomed to English composition, to undertake a regular correspondence with any one."

It was said laughingly, but Olivia did not relent, though Kate begged piteously for an occasional letter. She would promise no more than she had done at first—to write if she had anything to tell. Ten days later, the Pomfrets were actually gone. The great drawing-room at Caverton went into brown holland, and a padlock was put upon the lodge-gate.

Thus Westbrook's most obvious and natural means of communication with Olivia were cut off.

The following week he rode down to the Cedars, and found the ladies—out. He tried yet once again, a few days later, before he left town; but with no better success. It was very provoking. He was going down to Goodwood, and then on to the moors, for the 12th of August; and after that, on a round of visits in Scotland; and he would not be in or near London again for three months at least. He consoled himself, however, with the reflection that the tenor of Olivia's life was very even: she would see few people, and she would go nowhere in the interval, to disturb the impression he was pretty confident he had made; and at the end of the three or four months he would return to find her just as he left her—only duller, and therefore more ready to prize his society. He had quite made up his mind that in the course of the ensuing winter he was to relinquish his independence, by inducing Olivia to become his wife. The short time that was left him, therefore, he resolved to enjoy his freedom, as best he might.

It was a dull November day when Julian Westbrook next mounted his hack at the Albany, and rode down to Fordingham. The fog hung about the river, and smothered everything that lay beyond the flat meadows, and the ghostlike skeletons of elms on either side of him, as he passed through the lane towards the Cedars. The last few

leaves of autumn slid noiselessly through the damp, heavy air around. The colour of everything in the landscape seemed to be blotted out. It did not look like the same scene he had left, scarcely four months before. As he drew near the gate, his eyes fell upon a board, upon which was written, "To be let or sold. For particulars, apply to Mr. Rook, house agent, Maddox-street." He drew in his rein sharply, and sat there frowning at the board, as though he were unable to seize the meaning of those words; then opening the gate, he touched his horse with the spur, and rode on to the house at a smart canter.

The shutters were all closed. It was full five minutes before a woman in drab came to the door, and in answer to Westbrook's inquiries, told him that Mr. Marston's family had left the Cedars some two months ago. An agent had bought the place, and it was now again in the market. She did not know where Mr. Marston's family had gone. Had never heard. Perhaps Mr. Rook knew. All the furniture was sold, after the family left, by auction. Couldn't tell him no more: he had best go to Mr. Rook.

But when, on his return to London, the discomfited Julian applied to Mr. Rook, the latter individual professed himself as ignorant of the movements of the family as the woman had done.

All his dealings were with Mr. Rupert Marston, at Mr. Claxton's house of business, in the City. Now, Julian was perfectly conscious of Rupert's dislike to him; and he returned it. He felt an extreme repugnance to applying to young Marston for information about his sister: and, after some deliberation, he came to the conclusion that, if the Pomfrets could not help him, he must leave it to time and chance to obtain this information. He never doubted but that, somehow or other, it would turn up before long.

CHAPTER IX.

CHANGED FORTUNES.

It was the evening of the 12th August—of the day that Westbrook was beginning his campaign among the moors. The day had been one of those few of real summer which we enjoy in England; its close was clear and golden, promising a glorious morrow. The library window stood open, and through it the sweet breath of jasmine and honeysuckle was borne from the clusters that hung from the trellis around. In the centre of the lawn Olivia had lately placed a small white marble basin, round which her doves settled in relays, drinking and pluming themselves, and then fluttering back to their dove-cote in the elm hard by, while others of their family replaced them. Beyond, and in strong contrast to the white marble, the green-

black cedars sent their long shadows at this hour eastward over the close-shaven lawn; while, further off again, the brown barges and pleasure-boats glided by upon the sunset river, in which every reed and dock-leaf upon the opposite bank was reflected, as in a golden mirror. In those rich meadow lands yonder, which looked almost metallically green by this light, cattle were feeding lazily to their hearts' content, while one or two had come down to the water to drink, and were standing in it knee-deep, whisking the flies off with their tails, and raising their black dripping muzzles ever and anon with an air of quiet satisfaction.

It was a picture eminently characteristic of England—of its middle-class respectability and plenty. The quiet suburban villa, with everything for comfort and nothing for ostentation; that marvellous carpet of green velvet, so unlike anything that is known by the name of grass on the Continent; the lush, dank pastures opposite, where the heavy-uddered cattle were feeding in sleek contentment, were suggestive elements in a scene, not beautiful, perhaps, but pleasant in the sense that it conveyed to the mind abundance, security, and peace.

Mr. Marston's chair was wheeled near the window. He sat there dozing; but woke from time to

time to observe that it was very dark, and to elicit the stereotyped rejoinder from his daughter; after which he relapsed into his former state again, quite satisfied. Olivia was alone with her father, as indeed she generally was now. Since his illness she liked less than ever to leave him. Aunt Clo, finding it dull, betook herself constantly to one or other of the neighbours to tea, whence she returned at ten o'clock in a black silk hood and galoches, attended by her maid. Rupert often came home very late now—sometimes not at all. An early dinner had therefore been established, with a tea-supper at nine, when, if Rupert was at home, he dined; but the greater part of those long summer evenings Olivia and her father were alone.

She was doing nothing: she was building some Spanish castle, I believe; for her eyes had a dreamy, abstracted look, and her hands lay listless over the piece of tapestry before her, whose brilliant colours contrasted with the black oak chair and dim figure of the old man.

On a small table stood a basket of nectarines, an old silver claret-jug, and some glasses. The last rays of the sunset, stealing slantwise into the room, lit the rosy-cheeked fruit and silver flagon, and fell upon the snow-white hair and calm sleeping majesty of the old man. And then the shades

of twilight gradually swallowed them up, and everything in the room grew dim and indistinct.

I have dwelt thus long on that home picture, the taste and luxury of its details, and the tranquillity that reigned there, because this was the last evening in Olivia's life she was destined to pass in that house, under the same conditions of peace and security. A great change was at hand. The moment was come when the even routine of her life was to be broken in upon; when her labour of filial love, while increased twofold, must yet make room for busy thought and action in other fields. That golden summer's evening she often looked back upon, as dividing two distinct portions of her life from each other.

It was half-past eight; Mr. Marston still dozed: it was too dark to read or work without lights, and Olivia was loth to ring for them. She sat there, watching the shadows deepening on the river, the purple veil drooping lower and lower over the heavens, the flat green meadows turning to dusky grey, when a large bat flitted past the window, almost close to her face. She instinctively drew back with a shudder, and found Rupert standing beside her. He had come in so noiselessly—contrary to his usual habit—that Olivia had not heard him. He raised his finger to his lips, and pointed to his father.

"Come into the next room," he said, in a hoarse whisper; "I have something to say to you."

His sister rose, and followed him without a word. There was that in her brother's manner which told her it was no ordinary communication she was about to hear.

"Olive, you must prepare yourself for a piece of bad news."

She said nothing, but sat down on a chair near at hand; a sudden weakness came over her, which made her distrust her own strength. He took her hand in both of his; he felt that it turned icy-cold, and he waited a moment or two before he spoke again.

"Olive, a great misfortune has befallen our father."

"Go on; only tell me the worst at once."

"He is ruined. What I feared has come to pass. Lozados is bankrupt."

She started up, and threw herself into his arms.

"Oh, Rupert, our poor father!"

It was all she said. She lay there quite motionless for several minutes, and her brother had the tact to remain silent also. He knew her deep strong nature too well to attempt to soften this blow. It was a heavy one, but she would rise up from it; for it was not of a kind to impair energy

such as Rupert knew his sister possessed. Her first words, her only thoughts, were for her father. After an interval she whispered,

"How can we hide this from him, Rupert? It would kill him just now to be told this."

"My darling, sooner or later he must know it. I leave it to you to break it to him when and how you will. You know I wouldn't have grieved you with the burden of this heavy anxiety if it were possible to avert its consequences in any way—if there were the remotest chance of our being able to continue living here, surrounded by comfort and luxury. But there is not. Everything must be sold—servants—horses—every thing given up. My father will have very little besides what the sale of the house and furniture fetches. There is a small sum that belonged to our mother, which is safe in the English funds, and that is all that is left of his large fortune. It is a terrible wreck, Olive—a terrible wreck! If he would only have listened to me instead of——"

"Dear Rupert, don't think of reproaching him now, even in thought; only let us try and shield him from the weight of this dreadful blow, which he will feel far, far more than you or I can. It is nothing to us comparatively, who are young and strong; but think of him in his old age, blind and helpless, brooding over the past with fruitless re-

gret—O, Rupert, what would I give to spare him this!"

"God knows, Olive, so would I—and I have thought of little else since early this morning, when the extent of the calamity was made known to me. One thing I can't be sufficiently thankful for—that my father gave up the conduct of all his affairs into my hands when he became so ill. It renders it much easier for me to do all that it is absolutely necessary should be done, at once—and you can take your own time, Olive, in breaking it to him. But he must be prepared for the change."

"When must it come?" she asked, in a low voice. "When must we leave the house?"

"Not for two or three weeks. I could sell it to-morrow, but hope to do so to more advantage by putting it up to auction, and I shall have it advertised. You must give the servants warning, however. I am afraid even Fritz must go. We must break up the establishment as soon as possible, for every day is a serious drain on our income. My salary, you know, is small. We shall not make up altogether more than 300*l.* a year. The change in all our ways, Olive, must be a complete one. We must come into London, I fear; for even omnibuses and rails run away with a great deal out of such an income."

"And Aunt Clo? What will she do? It has

been very trying sometimes, Rupert, her being with us even *here;* how much worse will it be in our poverty, in a small lodging?"

"Rats desert a falling house. You will see that Aunt Clo shows no desire to follow us into obscurity, Olive. You must be prepared to lose most of your friends, I am afraid, when your ways and theirs are split wide asunder."

"If Aunt Clo leaves us I shall be too thankful, Rupert; and as to friends, the Pomfrets are the only neighbours whom I can call so. They are gone, and with the rest I have no wish to keep up any communication. Oh! if I could only do something, Rupert, to get money—something to help to support myself, and not to be a burden to you! But I feel so helpless! I have no accomplishments; I am not even a good worker; and *he*, poor darling, will require my attention now more than ever. I couldn't leave him, or else I might perhaps go——"

"Olive, whatever befalls us, as long as I can work, remember your place is by my father's side, where you will find enough to do, my poor child, in the daily drudgery of life, deprived of all the comforts to which you have been accustomed. Don't think about work: it will come to you in some form. In adversity a woman is often more helpful in other ways than in stitching."

Olivia sat down and buried her face in her hands.

"Poor father—how will he ever bear this? I dread it, Rupert. I dread telling him more—far more than the poverty itself. God help him to bear it!"

"So He will, through you, Olive, and I hope a little through me. Henceforward we must be more closely united than ever, my sister. We are alone against all the world, and we will face it courageously."

The next morning, after a sleepless night, Olivia prepared to tell her aunt of the great change in their fortunes. Miss Pringle was at first incredulous as to the extent of the ruin which had overtaken her brother-in-law; then she became loud in her reproaches at the imprudence which had brought about this result; and then at last she was silent. What her decision would be, whether or no she would elect to remain with her impoverished relations, was yet to be seen. But Olivia's mind was now wholly occupied with a far greater anxiety. That sleepless night had been productive of one definite resolve. As long, and as far as possible, she determined to conceal from her father the condition of his affairs. She hardly dared hope to do so permanently. But if she could gradually accustom his mind to the great

change which must take place in their manner of life, the danger of a sudden shock in his present condition would be averted.

The doves were cooing in the sunshine; the fountain was babbling its tale of pleasantness and peace: never had her home looked so charming to Olivia as it did that morning, when she knew how soon now it must all pass into the hands of strangers. She drew her chair to the old place at her father's side, and she steadied her voice to read the *Times*, as usual, from beginning to end. But the eye and the voice alone read: the mind was other where. When she had done, she put down the paper, and said, with as unconcerned a voice and manner as she could command,

"Father, should you mind very much leaving this place and going into London? Rupert and I have been talking over it. The distance is very inconvenient for him, and for me, too. We think it would be much better if we were to change houses. Perhaps a smaller house would do for us in London, you know."

"Change? Leave this house? What do you mean, Olivia? What's this—eh?"

"You wouldn't mind it for Rupert's sake, father, would you?"

"What are you talking about, child? I'm too old—too old to change. Wait till I'm under

ground. It won't be long. Rupert can go to London if he likes, but you and I'll remain here."

There was something of his old decision—something even of sharpness in the way he spoke. Olivia hesitated a moment before she said,

"To be parted from Rupert would be a great sorrow to us both, father. He is our morning and evening star. We should not be able to get on at all, I think, if he were to go and live away from us in London."

A shade passed over the blind man's face: he sighed.

"Perhaps you are tired of your quiet life here, Olive?"

She felt the blood rush into her face: she was glad for once that her father could not see.

"Not tired of its quiet, father—oh, no! But this is, perhaps, damp—damp and foggy, so near the river, and surrounded by trees. London, no doubt, would be healthier—better for us in all ways."

"You are not feeling ill, are you?" he said, hastily.

"No, father."

"It can't be much darker in London than here—that's one thing," he muttered.

"And the houses are much warmer," observed his daughter. "You will not have all the draughts

you have here. Rupert will be home, too, a whole hour earlier, and leave us a whole hour later than he does now. That will be a great thing, father, won't it?"

"But I have a long lease of the house, Olive, and I won't part with it at a loss. No, no; I'd rather remain where I am."

He settled himself back in his chair, as though he had relapsed into his former condition of mind, and were resolved to abide in it.

"It seems," said Olivia, quietly, "that the Cedars may be parted with to great advantage. At least, so Rupert says."

Mr. Marston turned sharply towards his daughter, but he said nothing. The mine, however, was sprung. Little by little, day after day, the work of overcoming his natural repugnance to the idea of any change was carried further. Olivia voluntarily accepted the position forced on her: to please Rupert and herself, their father was asked to make this great sacrifice of his wishes and personal comfort. It was an ungracious office, this apparently selfish pleading; and it moved Olivia to tears, seeing how the blind man dreaded all that was strange and unknown, to find him, in his undemonstrative love for his children, yielding to her gentle persistence. But, having once brought his mind over the bar of rough waters, the fine old man let himself drift in

silence whithersoever his children steered. The weakening of all his faculties tended to this result, no doubt. And the decision which Miss Pringle arrived at in the course of that week helped greatly, I believe, to reconcile him to the proposed change.

"My dear, as to your keeping all this a secret from your papa, it is perfect nonsense, you know. You can't keep your altered circumstances from him—how can you? Living in a poky lodging, with a maid-of-all-work to cook your dinner, my dear, how is it to be done? And that reminds me to tell you what I was going to say about myself. My health, as you know, is very delicate; I'm obliged to take great care of myself; and really I do feel as if I should be in your way, my dear, in a lodging, and living in the very different way you must now. And in a confined part of the town, too. No! much as I shall regret leaving you, my love, I feel it would not be right to indulge in the selfish wish to remain with you, though I shall, of course, *see* you very constantly, and I hope to be able to take you out by-and-by, when your affairs are a little set to rights. I dare say they won't turn out as bad, after all, as you expect."

Olivia smiled—a little sadly, perhaps. Had she been cynically disposed, she might have indulged her inclination at the expense of poor human nature. As it was, she only assured her aunt

(with entire sincerity) that she cordially approved of her resolution; and Olivia did not think it necessary to add that Miss Pringle's prospect of taking her "out" offered no temptation to her niece, and would certainly not be realised in their present altered circumstances.

A few days later the Cedars was sold by private contract to Mr. Rook, the auctioneer; and before the month was out a sale took place of nearly all the furniture, books, and pictures. Of furniture, enough was saved to fill the small apartment Rupert had taken in London; of books, all his father's and most of his sister's favourite authors were rescued; of pictures, since the blind man could sustain no sense of loss through these, none were spared. All with which he could by possibility come into contact—the silver and the fine damask for his own use at table, the choice old wine for his own drinking—were carefully put aside from the general wreck; and for the same reason, Olivia's piano. Through those senses left to him, the old and enfeebled man should never learn, if possible, the ruin which had overtaken all that he loved on earth.

CHAPTER X.

THE NEW HOME.

THE miserable spectacle, so often described, of a crowd of hook-nosed, dirty-looking men elbowing each other round a table, while almost as great a crowd of curious idlers are strolling through the rooms which they have never seen before, and while the appraiser's voice, and the sound of the hammer, and the buzz of indifferent conversation, rouse other echoes from those the quiet house has hitherto known—this miserable spectacle the Cedars witnessed at the end of September. Three days before that, Mr. Marston and his family moved into the apartments which were to be their home henceforward.

There is a street leading out of the Strand—no matter its name—at the end of which a row of

handsome, old-fashioned houses faces the river. Those who know this part of London will at once recognise the spot; for the information of others, it is only necessary to say that, quietly hid away from the turmoil which reigns only a stone's throw from it, such a row of buildings does exist—their architect, probably, some disciple of Inigo Jones, their original occupants, possibly, well-to-do merchants in the beginning of the last century. The broad strip of pavement which runs in front of them has no *flâneurs;* the dilapidated iron rails which divide the street, on the other side, from the wharves below, give an interrupted view beyond of the penny steamers panting every minute up and down the river, and of the gas-works on the opposite bank, and of the great bridges to right and left, with the House of Parliament on one flank, and the Tower, with St. Paul's, on the other. This is better than looking on a brick wall pierced with holes, more especially when those holes have human eyes in them to watch all that their neighbours do. But Fashion is justified of her children, and she wanders no longer by the banks of our great river. Time was, no doubt, when powdered lacqueys hung about the lintels of these broad pilastered doors, through which sedan-chairs passed gaily in and out of nights, and their owners, in brocaded dressing-gowns, sipped chocolate at those windows that

look upon the river; and no superannuated placards (driven from the great thoroughfares) were hung in those days against the railings, nor did colonies of broken glass and orange-peel find refuge in their vicinity. Now, business only tempts the pedestrian to turn out of the Strand down the narrow street that leads to this *cul-de-sac;* coach-wheels rarely rumble over the ill-fitting stones, which have not been renewed for Heaven knows how long; it is a stitch dropped in the great network of busy London life.

In this row of houses Rupert had found apartments, and it will be at once apparent how many advantages the situation possessed for them all. In the heart of London, within a quarter of an hour's walk of Rupert's house of business, Mr. Marston would find all the sunshine that our City ever enjoys, with a constant current of that fresh river-air of which he was so fond. On that long strip of pavement he could take his quarter-deck walk, with almost as little fear of interruption as on the terrace of his old home. It was easy for the blind man to learn the very confined map to which his daily evolutions would be circumscribed. The rooms he lived in were upon the ground-floor: the sitting-room to the front, the bedroom and a very small parlour to the back. There were doors of communication between each, and a single stone step

led him out, with Fritz's arm, upon the broad sunny pavement.

Rupert and Olivia were upon the second floor. It was the one drawback to this apartment—and everything must have *one* drawback at least—that the intervening floor was occupied. Mrs. Flaherty, the landlady, assured Olivia that it was impossible she or her father could sustain any discomfort on this score, since "the party" occupying the enviable position of first-floor lodger never slept there, and was the quietest gentleman that ever stepped, during the few hours he passed there daily. Not that he came there by any means every day, added Mrs. Flaherty (thereby justifying her nationality); on the contrary, a whole week would go by, sometimes, without his appearing. In short, if the first floor was to be let, it was clearly impossible for the tenant to be more innocuous, and in every way desirable. Still, it was a drawback that two flights of stairs should separate Olivia's room from her father's. Since his alarming illness, however, Fritz had always slept in his master's room, so that Rupert and his sister had no uneasiness in being thus far from their father at night.

Fritz was the only servant the Marstons kept. Mrs. Flaherty and her cook did the housework between them, and the helpful old German generally lent his hand in the kitchen in preparing some dish

for his master's special consumption. It was well that Rupert had not, like most young men in the present day, pampered his appetite to that degree of fastidiousness which leads an ill-dressed dinner to be regarded as one of the most serious punishments this life can award. The mutton at first *was* very often underdone, and had to be sent down in slices and broiled; and the memory of those leaden crusts under which a beefsteak was periodically buried—is it not as a nightmare unto them even now? For themselves, Rupert and Olivia bore their change of *cuisine*, as they had supported heavier trials, with equanimity. For their father, they were naturally anxious that this change should not be perceptible. With Fritz's help, and the doctrines of an old cookery-book of her mother's, which Olivia now studied sedulously, she succeeded in this with complete success. She went down into the kitchen herself; she helped the little maid to the measurement and proper mixing of ingredients. It was a sight to see her with knit brows expounding from the solemn text of Mrs. Glasse, in the kitchen of that London lodging-house. And she was rewarded as she deserved.

Mrs. Flaherty was not "a character." She was a common-place, kind-hearted old Irishwoman; rather shrewd, and very talkative, but generally inexact in all her statements; a devout Roman

Catholic, credulous as a child, and slatternly in appearance. She was the widow of an excise officer, and had seen "better days." But those were long ago. She had kept lodgings in London for the last five-and-twenty years; and there was, in consequence, a certain flavour of cockneydom stirred into this Hibernian compound. She occupied a room on the same floor as Olivia and her brother, but to the back. The floor above was at present unlet; and, though corresponding to what are generally garrets, it consisted of four comfortable and airy rooms. This, with the kitchen and Mrs. Flaherty's adjoining demesne, formed the whole house.

Rupert took his sister over their new home before he finally agreed to Mrs. Flaherty's offer; and as Olivia saw at once all the advantages it possessed for her father, the bargain was closed then and there. Little by little, Mr. Marston's mind was reconciled to the idea of living in London—*for his children's sakes.* They had found a house for him by the river-side—a sunny house and quiet. His rooms were on the ground floor; his two old friends would often come in here and see him; the bustle and business of London was near at hand for his children—for Rupert more especially. If he thought with regret, then or afterwards, of the soft velvet lawn on which he

used to walk in summer-time, of the cawing of the rooks and cooing of the doves, and the many peaceful country sounds which had cheered the great solitude of blindness, he hid the feeling away carefully out of his children's sight. Was the self-sacrifice and devotion all on one side? Not so.

The room into which they led him that still September afternoon, when Mr. Marston took his leave of the Cedars, had been made as like the library of their old home as furniture could make it. Had the eyes of the blind man been opened to look around him as he entered, he would not have learnt the change of fortune that had befallen him from the aspect of the room. There, along the side of the pale-green wall, with its rich cornice of white stucco, and over against the carved marble mantelpiece (both telling of the house's original estate), stood one of the walnut bookshelves saved from the sale. The Turkey carpet, the easy-chairs, Olivia's piano and her Davenport, a *jardinière* full of such plants as she thought would best stand the London air, and a Venetian leather screen, to shield from the draught of the open door the corner into which Mr. Marston's chair was drawn —these were household gods from the old temple transported to the new. The small parlour adjoining was equally comfortable; and into Mr. Mars-

ton's bedroom most of the old furniture had been moved, and arranged, as nearly as possible, in the way to which he was used. For Olivia's and Rupert's rooms, on the other hand, nothing but what was essential and of the simplest kind had been kept back. Upon the second floor their father would assuredly never set his foot.

Mr. Marston knew very little of London. Half a lifetime ago he had spent a few months there occasionally; but it had never been his home, and of its geography he was quite ignorant.

"Is the house well situated?" he had asked.

"Nothing can be better," was his daughter's reply. "Airy and sunny; not far from Northumberland House and Whitehall, which, as you remember, father, is a line of palaces. We have the river in front of us, too."

"And what size is the house—eh?"

"Oh, large; quite as large as we want—larger, indeed."

"And the stabling? I hope Rupert has been particular about there being good stabling?"

"There is stabling close at hand. Rupert will see to all that, father. You may make your mind quite easy."

"And the rent? He hasn't told me anything about that yet, Olive. He must tell me; though I haven't the head for accounts I had, still I must

know—do you hear? I can't afford to pay an exorbitant rent—remember that."

"No, dear father; but you can quite trust Rupert. You know you have given up everything into his hands, and he is so careful, you could not manage better yourself."

"Ah, well, I don't know about that; the boy hasn't any experience, and women don't understand anything about money matters, Olive."

"The house will cost you a great deal less than this, father," she replied, rather nervously.

"Um! Well, Rupert must explain to me about it. I can't be running into debt. Moving is a great expense. 'Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves.' Rupert must explain everything to me."

But the weakened state of Mr. Marston's mind, his incapacity of fixing it upon any one subject for long together, rendered it comparatively easy to turn his attention from such explanations. And when he was once established in his new home—when he had got to know the relative position of doors and windows, and the arrangement of chairs and tables—when he had once slid into that new groove of existence which, as far as he was concerned, at least, so closely resembled the old one, he contentedly accepted the change without question, or disquietude of any kind. Truly the blow

had been dealt in mercy which rendered it possible to conceal the truth from the once shrewd and keenly sensitive old man.

There was a small incident—a very small one—which happened a few days after they had entered their new home; it was this.

The afternoon was warm for the time of year: Mr. Marston had taken his walk, and now sat by the open window. Olivia took a volume of Travels from the bookcase to read to her father, and drew her chair, as usual, close to his. As she did so, the folds of her coarse stuff dress touched his hand. He took it up between his finger and thumb, and said, after a minute's pause—

"Why don't you wear something thinner such a warm day, child?"

"This is better for London; things get so dirty here, and washing is expensive."

"Hem! it seems to me like sackcloth. I used to like to hear the rustle of your silk gown."

"I've only one, which I keep for grand occasions." She did not say that all the others were sold, as useless to her now.

"When did I sign a cheque?" he asked, suddenly; "it seems a long time."

"We've enough money in the house to go on with, father."

"Well, go and buy yourself a gown. 'And ye

shall walk in silk attire,'" he quavered out. "Why, what must your aunt have said when she saw you in that sackcloth—eh? I'll be bound she found it reminded her, somehow or other, of one of her old conquests."

Olivia laughed. "It is no use wearing smart dresses with only the smoky sparrows to see one. There is no one in town now, father. Even Aunt Clo, you know, is going to Margate. I don't want another gown now."

"Hem! I'm afraid—that is, I suppose she's not going to stay there, is she?"

"No; she's going to take a small house in Bayswater."

"Ah! that's where the fire was, Fritz was reading to me about. Terrible! I should like to send the poor souls something — a mother and five children—ta—ta! Let the parson have five pounds for them, child, without any name, will you? and then there's an end of *that*."

This was one of the trials she was so often subject to, when she had to evade the old man's charitable injunctions, which she was quite unable to obey, and then to satisfy him on the subject as best she might. Fortunately, his memory often failed him now; his old acuteness only returned by fits and starts.

One evening he was asleep when Rupert entered.

"What news from the City?" asked Mr. Marston, starting up with sudden alacrity. "What is the state of the funds—eh?"

"Consols firm at 93, father," said Rupert, with a half smile, half sigh.

"And no more absurd reports about Lozados—eh, Rupert? You're not going to try and frighten me again about him, I suppose, are you?"

"No, I am never going to try and frighten you again about him, father."

He turned to his sister after a moment's pause, and said:

"Whose death do you think I have just seen in the paper?—Lionel Pomfret's."

"Good heavens, how sudden! Where was it?"

"At Ems, on the 5th—a fortnight ago. I'm not surprised; he always looked an unhealthy fellow."

"I am very sorry for his poor mother."

"Have you ever written to them yet, Olive?"

"No; but I will do so now, of course."

"You promised to let them hear in case you had anything to tell them—don't you remember? They were so kind to you, that you've no right to keep them in ignorance of all that has befallen us, and of our present residence. It's quite different with all our other neighbours at Fordingham. I have made it generally understood that,

as circumstances now oblige us to live in strict retirement, you didn't wish to receive visits in London. I have therefore declined giving our address to the numerous well meant applications that have been made to me at Mr. Claxton's, to learn where you were to be found."

"That is just what I wished. It would bore me to death, Rupert, to have to receive the condolences of the Blighs and the Wellses, and all the tribes of Fordingham; and my time is even more occupied than it used to be. Indeed, that is the reason I have not yet written to Mrs. Pomfret. I fully meant to do so. I will write to-morrow. Shall I give any message from you?"

"Oh, remember me to them, and say I'm very sorry—something of that sort, you know; and mind you inquire particularly how my little friend the schoolgirl is. What is her name? Mary, ain't it? Nice little thing."

"Yes. By-the-bye, Aunt Clo was here to-day. She came in a new green bonnet, and brought me a present. What do you think it was? An old blonde dress, in which she used to dance at the Cheltenham Assembly Rooms fifty years ago, I should think. She kindly proposed to take me to Jullien's Promenade Concerts also."

The brother and sister laughed together; and Rupert, leaning over to his father, said:

"Miss Pringle sat with you some time, I hear, to-day? I hope she made herself agreeable, and that you enjoyed her visit."

"Hem! very good of her to come. She's gone though, I hope, ain't she? She's not going to stay? Ah! gone to Margate—that's all right."

And on having his doubts reassured, Mr. Marston gave a sigh of satisfaction.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LODGER ON THE FIRST FLOOR.

It will be seen that the chances of Julian Westbrook's discovering Olivia's present residence were remote. Had he been a genuine hero of romance, he would, no doubt, have caused Rupert to be followed from Mr. Claxton's office some afternoon, and traced to his sister's home; and he would then have dogged the young lady's steps pertinaciously till he *accidentally* came across her path. As it was, he did nothing of the sort. He made inquiries of every one whom he thought in the least likely to possess the information he sought; and he cursed Fortune for denying it to him. But Fortune treated him as she generally does those who behave so uncivilly to her—with contempt. During the long winter months that

followed—when Julian, from some cause or other, was detained in town, the Pomfrets being abroad, and most of his intimate friends in the country —the idle man of pleasure would have found a source of permanent interest in the cultivation of that passion which had attained to a certain growth during the past summer. For some time his vexation took a moody, misanthropic turn. He was angry with himself for having lost his opportunity; he was cross with the world (which was hunting in Leicestershire just then, and Julian didn't hunt); he was, above all, irritated against the whole of the fair sex collectively. He thought, or tried to think, that he had good reason to complain on this head—not an uncommon condition of mind with men like Julian. He was an ill-used man. He repeated this to himself every drizzly December afternoon that he rode down to Fordingham (having nothing in the world to do in London), and cultivated sentiment by letting his hack wander, at foot's pace, among the lanes surrounding the Cedars.

It is now time that I should speak of Mrs. Flaherty's first-floor lodger, whose eccentric tenure of his apartment excited Olivia's curiosity, it must be confessed, after she had once seen him. This was not until she had been for several weeks in her new home, during which time "the first

floor" came most mornings, vanishing again towards dusk, and remaining silent and invisible, in his rooms during the intervening hours. No bell ever rang from the first floor; no visitor was ever known to come there. The lodger carried away the key in his pocket every evening, and Mrs. Flaherty's desecrating brooms and dusters were only admitted at certain long intervals of time, the lodger not choosing to have his rooms "set to rights" during his absence. All this was a subject of profound indifference to Miss Marston, and she turned a deaf ear when Mrs. Flaherty began dilating upon the strange conduct of her "first floor," combined with his punctuality of payment, and his princely liberality in small matters. It was a subject of profound indifference to Olivia, I repeat, until she had seen this Mr. Thompson—for such was the unromantic name he bore—and then she began to feel a curiosity to hear something about him.

It was late in the afternoon—about the hour that Rupert generally returned—and Olivia, having left her father asleep, was going up to her own room for a few minutes, when, as she closed the sitting-room door softly behind her, she saw the figure of a man descending the stairs. She was so unaccustomed to see any man but her brother about the house, that she had begun to forget the

possibility of meeting a stranger upon that common territory, the staircase.

"Rupert," she said, as she advanced towards the figure, which was now within a few steps of the bottom one, "don't disturb my father; he is asleep. I didn't know you were come in."

She started back as she finished speaking, for the person who now stood close to her was a stranger.

Though dusk, it was still possible to distinguish his features as he raised his hat and bowed. He was not a very young man; a little bald about the temples; somewhat above the middle height; and of a square and powerful build. The lines of the face were full of mastery. The broad, massive brow; the aquiline nose; the large mouth, clasped so firmly under the short auburn moustache; the square, somewhat protruding chin, softened by its short beard, indicated a character of no common force. The expression of the eyes was sad, almost stern. But of all this Olivia saw nothing—nothing but that a middle-aged man, with a fine head, and the manners of a perfect gentleman, stood for an instant before her. His clothes looked rather shabby; he carried an oblong parcel under his arm; yet the man was unmistakably a gentleman. In the glance she had of his head, it re-

minded her of a portrait in the Pitti Palace which she had often thought about.

He had the good taste not to notice her mistake otherwise than by that silent bow. He passed on; and before Olivia had recovered from her surprise, he was gone.

When Mrs. Flaherty came up, ten minutes afterwards, to close Miss Marston's shutters, she found her leaning out of window, over the quickly darkening river.

"I suppose it was Mr. Thompson I met on the stairs just now—a tall man, dressed in black?"

"Sure and that'll be Mr. Thompson himself, miss. For what 'd I be havin' other gintlemin in the house for, save and except your brother, miss, and me a lone woman, as has always kep' me house respectable? And no one in the Row as can say a word agin me, though that Mrs. Burke is as spiteful as ever she can be, and——"

"Yes, I know, Mrs. Flaherty; but I wanted to ask you about Mr. Thompson. Do you know anything about him? How long has he had these lodgings?"

"Somethin' betther nor three months, miss. And a noble cha*rak*ter he is, is Mr. Thompson, that niver looks at both sides of a half-crown. But as to where he come from, and where he go to,

and why he be so shockin' melancholy,—faith! it's not Biddy Flaherty that gossips and pries into her lodgers' sacrets, miss, nor tells all down the Row what ye have for dinner, nor how much linen goes to the wash in the week, as *some* does. Lord bless y'r sowl, miss, if I'd ha' chose it, I could ha' found out, in coorse, where he come from; but he pays me me rint reg'lar, and is a princely-hearted gintleman—and the rist is no consarn of mine. Is it now, miss?"

"Of course not, Mrs. Flaherty. You cannot be sufficiently thankful that you have such a model lodger. I suppose you don't know, then, what it is makes him come here during the day and go away at night?"

"I think," said Mrs. Flaherty, with knit brows, as though she were solving some difficult problem, "that he must be a scholard, or a doctor, or somethin'. He's a deal o' books about—which gits covered with dust afore iver he'll let me in to clane them—and papers with feet and hands and bowns; and sich a shockin' thing as I come upon last time I was there—it gave me quite a turn!—a man's bawdy, with all the flish and sinews drawed as nat'ral as life, and no skin on it! And thin he has a great boord covered over whiniver I comes in—somethin' medical, for sure—and a tin box of instruments, as I take it, which he tould me

niver to touch. I wouldn't, bless me sowl, for all the world, for fear o' poison!"

"And there is a strong smell of turpentine—is there not?" asked Olivia.

"That's thrue for you, miss, sure enough. And how could ye be guessin' that, now?"

"Your lodger is an artist—a painter, Mrs. Flaherty. I see it all. He comes here to paint, for the sake of much purer and clearer light than he can have in the dingy part of London he probably inhabits."

This view of the case did not recommend itself very strongly to Mrs. Flaherty. She seemed to apprehend that the dignity of her "first floor" must suffer from the supposition that he painted "pictures to sell"—"which ain't in no ways likely," she added, with some show of reason, "for no one iver comes here, and he niver takes nothin' away—so how can he sell pictures, miss? which is as free with his money as can be! No, faith! me belief is that he's a *scholard*," concluded Mrs. Flaherty, knitting her brows once more; and this reconciled every difficulty in the good woman's mind.

Olivia did not pursue the discussion further. She had no stronger argument than she had used to oppose to Mrs. Flaherty's plausible one, even had she felt disposed to continue this guesswork;

and she did not. She went down-stairs to her father, knowing that Mrs. Flaherty would continue gossiping there for an hour, if she gave her the opportunity.

In the course of the evening she told Rupert of her encounter with the stranger, and her mistake.

"The fellow is a gentleman," said her brother, "or he would have tried to scrape an acquaintance with you on the strength of your speaking to him. By the by——"

He stopped short; then, after a second or two, continued—

"I hate secrets, Olive, and now more than ever we will have none from each other, if possible. I met Westbrook in Charing-cross to-day."

His sister was trying to do a piece of plain work. She did not look up, or leave off, but there occurred one or two uneven stitches just then.

"I was going to pass him, but he stopped me, and inquired about you and my father, and where you lived, and whether he mightn't come and see you, and ended by doing me the great honour to beg me to come and see *him*. I assure you I was nearly overpowered; however, I managed to preserve my presence of mind, and I replied, with tolerable coolness, that for certain family reasons you were living in strict retirement just now, and

saw no one. For myself, my business habits prevented my paying visits. He looked annoyed, and said he couldn't believe that *you* would refuse to see him if you knew that an old friend was desirous of making his inquiries after you in person."

"I always told you, Rupert," she said, very quietly, "that he was not as worldly as you thought—that he had more heart. The change in our worldly position would not influence him. But it is much better that he should not come here. You are quite right."

"If I disliked his coming to the Cedars, Olive, of course I should dislike it doubly here. There is every reason against it. Among others, one I have said nothing to you about as yet—for nothing was settled. But this very day, curiously enough, Mr. Claxton has spoken again of the probability of his wishing to send me to the West Indies for two or three months, to visit certain property there, and settle some disputes which it is difficult to do at home. His placing this trust in me is very complimentary, and, as such, I can hardly refuse it; for it will raise my position in the house, and my salary, very considerably. The drawback, of course, Olive, is leaving you and my father here; but it will not be for long—three or four months at most, I believe."

"You mustn't let any thought of us trouble

you," said his sister, laying her hand upon his arm; "we shall do very well during your absence, and I am delighted that Mr. Claxton should place this trust in you. I wouldn't for the world have it otherwise, dear."

"You're not afraid of being alone in a London lodging with my father? You wouldn't have anyone with you during my absence?"

"Certainly not. What should I be afraid of? Nothing can be quieter than this house. My life, as you know, runs like a piece of clockwork now, without the very smallest variation from day to day. And I am quite content that it should be so. Therefore you may leave me, Rupert, with a quiet mind. You will go to the other side of the globe, and come back and find me stitching away as you left me; and I shall probably not exchange half a dozen words with any one but Mrs. Flaherty and Aunt Clo during your absence."

"That is just what I should wish, Olive, and that is why I should particularly object to Westbrook's finding his way here now. It seems brutal to condemn you to this solitude, my dear; but I know the world, and I know you must be doubly careful when you are virtually left alone. You have no women-friends; and as to men, if you should want assistance or advice during my absence, you have Mr. Claxton to apply to—the

kindest man alive. In our present position, the quieter you keep, the fewer people you see, the better. It shan't be always so; but while I am away you must promise me to close your convent-doors more carefully than ever."

There was, no doubt, a certain savour of pride in what Rupert believed to be simply a wise prevision for his sister's welfare. But wise and foolish alike, how futile are such previsions against the great network of circumstances which life is perpetually weaving around us!

Three weeks later, Rupert Marston embarked at Southampton for Jamaica.

CHAPTER XII.

DROPPED ON THE STAIRS.

THE condition of Olivia Marston's mind at this time was one common enough in real life, I believe, especially among women of imagination and sensibility, but seldom permitted by novelists to their first-class heroines. She had been dazzled and captivated for a season by a man of a very inferior stamp. The strong hand of her brother had held her back before it had been too late; yet still her eyes were scarcely opened to behold good from evil. She could not but believe still that Rupert was unjust towards Westbrook.

She had not given up in her heart of hearts "making allowances" for him: the energy with which she agreed with Rupert that Westbrook was not to come to the house, proved, perhaps more

than anything, that she mistrusted her own strength.

Olivia had been too much occupied about others during the past three months to think of herself, and to indulge in any sentimentality, had she been so disposed.

Active work is the best antidote for every species of moral disease; and as yet the girl's healthy mind could scarcely be said to have imbibed any infection. The time was come, however, now that she was to be silent during all the long evenings that her father dozed, and companionless at the early breakfasts, when her mind, with so many additional hours for reflection, might not improbably return to the happy days of the past spring, and linger over them. An incident apparently trivial, but fraught with grave consequences, occurred just then.

It was early in January when Rupert sailed. In the course of the following week Mrs. Flaherty told Olivia, with a radiant face, that her third floor was at last let, and let very well too, to a quiet elderly lady named Crosbie and her niece. Unexceptionable references: The Rev. Mr. Sparshott, Union Chapel; and Mr. Jonas Unguent, Secretary to the Society for the Secret Distribution of Tracts in the Papal States. The ladies were to take possession in a few days.

Olivia was sitting at the parlour window when the cab containing the new lodgers arrived. There was a great deal of luggage, comprising sundry hair-trunks, bandboxes, and paper-parcels; an old-fashioned desk in a green baize cover, several music-books, and a birdcage. A thin woman of fifty, with a hard pinched face and grey hair, dressed in black, stepped from the cab. There was a general hollowness about this person's figure, as though the front of it had been scooped out, and the shoulders were penuriously trying to meet, which suited the expression of her face. Olivia had full opportunity to watch it, as its owner stood haggling with the cabman over his fare. To her companion this operation seemed to be profoundly displeasing. She knit her brow and bit her pretty lips, and after supplicating the elder lady to yield to the man's demand, however great the extortion might be, she drew out a smart leather purse from her own pocket, and, placing a shilling in the man's hand, ran swiftly up the steps of the house, leaving her companion to follow.

The contrast between aunt and niece, if such they were, was indeed complete. A little plump figure, a complexion of lilies and roses, a profusion of golden hair, a lovely little *nez retroussé*, with delicate nostrils, like pale pink shells, the whitest teeth, the neatest ankle, the sweetest, most child-

like expression of face—Olivia examined her attentively as she stood there, with the birdcage in her hand, tapping impatiently with her foot, while her aunt discussed the extra shilling with cabby. And Olivia made up her mind that this was one of the prettiest creatures she had ever beheld. The flaw—for of course a woman's keen scrutiny detected the flaw—was in her eyes. They were small grey eyes; with a greenish light in them, and were not altogether harmonious with the rest of the face—though capable of more expression, possibly, than softer eyes might have been. They were like the eyes of a clever child, clear and keen, unless when veiled by the mist of tender emotion, and appearing, when under the influence of passion, to burn up until the pupils became no more than two specks of concentrated flame. It is probable that she saw Olivia at the window; for just when her impatience at the squabble between her aunt and cabby was most demonstrative, she turned her head quickly round, and then it was she drew out her own purse. Her dress formed as great a contrast to her aunt's as everything else about her: it was bright and gay, though in good taste, and certainly did not indicate poverty.

At an early hour two or three mornings after, Olivia heard from the room above hers the sound of a powerful high voice practising scales and exer-

cises, followed by Italian Opera airs, certain passages in which were sung over and over again, until the singer had attained greater precision of execution. Olivia then threw up her window; her neighbour overhead had already opened hers. It was a fine winter's morning; a thin frosty mist hung over the river, through which the sun was beginning to gleam; and the canary upon the window-ledge up above, rejoicing in those first rays, was emulating his mistress in his wild flights of song. Though the harmony thus produced was doubtful, Olivia listened with pleasure. A bird's song and a fresh voice in the early morning have hints of the country and of spring-time in them, doubly dear in murky London. Presently the singer left off, and came to the window. Then followed a trio, of which Olivia caught some fragments.

"Oh, zu noisy Dicky! eat this sugar, sir, and be quiet—do. I can't hear myself, zu make such a row, zu troublesome Dicky! Three times I've tried to get that B flat, and——"

"Clara," said a harsh voice, belonging no doubt to Mrs. Crosbie, "you'll have no voice to-night if you remain at that window. Come away, and don't be a fool with that bird."

"Twee-twee-twee-twee-twee," remonstrated Dicky, in a high counter-treble.

"No, Dicky!" broke in the soprano with a light laugh. It's no use, zu foolish little bird. We must come away from the window, because a nasty cross aunt says we must, and I shall throw a cloth over your cage, zu chatterbox. Come, give me a kiss."

And Olivia, raising her eyes, could see the fair face of the young singer pouting her rosy lips forward towards the cage, which she had swung outside the ledge, and the occupant of which, twittering as he hopped along his perch, thrust his little beak through the bars to greet his mistress.

"Come, Clara," rose the harsh contralto voice in the trio once more, "don't fool away your time there; it worrits me to death, it does; and there's your rehearsal at eleven o'clock too, and you haven't gone through your part yet. You're the most thoughtless creature! I do believe you'd lose your head if I wasn't there to look after you. To think you're a married woman, too, going on just for all the world like a child. I wonder you're not ashamed."

The married woman knit her pretty brows and hummed in a sort of wilful, defiant way, as she looked up and down the river, without vouchsafing any reply; then, unhooking the cage, she muttered, as she took it in—"Well, Dicky, zu and I will fly

away together some day, won't we?" And the window was shut down.

The listener below sat pondering some time as to the history and condition of the lodgers overhead. It seemed that the younger lady was a professional singer, and, stranger still, that she was a married woman.

In such an uneventful life as Olivia's even a trifling incident is capable of stirring the still water, as the smallest pebble dropped into a well creates a disturbance little commensurate with its size. And before the afternoon was past this pebble was followed by another.

Olivia heard the two ladies pass her door and go down-stairs, towards noon. A few minutes later she herself went out, having a commission in the Strand, which she took advantage of her father's being on the terrace with Fritz's arm to execute, so that he should not miss her. As she opened the house door, Mr. Thompson was just putting in his latch-key to enter. He drew back and bowed. They had not seen each other face to face since that evening nearly a month ago. This time their eyes met, and Olivia felt that his were bent with keen scrutiny on hers.

When she reached home half an hour later, a letter directed to her was lying on the table. It was carefully sealed with a coat of arms sur-

mounted with the crest of a man in armour; for Olivia, after the manner of many women, inspected the letter minutely before opening it, instead of taking the more obvious method of satisfying her curiosity at once.

The letter contained another, crumpled, and the envelope of which was partially torn. Upon the half-sheet of paper which enclosed it were written these words:

"Mr. Thompson presents his compliments to Miss Marston, and begs to enclose a letter which he believes belongs to her, as he found it on the stairs a few minutes ago."

All that was left of the superscription on the enclosed letter was the syllable *ston*, and the words *Terrace, Strand.* The writing did not seem altogether unfamiliar to Olivia, though she felt sure the letter was not hers. It might be Rupert's; but if so, how did it come upon the stairs, nearly three weeks after he had sailed?

To satisfy herself on this point she opened the letter, though not without a certain hesitation.

It began, without name or other indication to whom the words were addressed, thus:

"What is the use of recrimination? Your conduct has certainly deprived you of any right——"

She read no more, but hastily turned the leaf and looked for the signature. There was none.

No date; nothing to show whence the letter came.

She sat looking at the fire for some minutes, pondering what she should do; how she should discover for whom the letter was intended, so as not to give a document which seemed of an unusually private nature into wrong hands; and how, in default of this knowledge, she could restore it, without risk of a similar error, to the writer.

The first question was, whether or not the letter was addressed to Rupert. In the words Olivia had read, there was nothing to show that this was not the case. But the letter had been dropped by some one on the stairs, and Olivia remembered that Mrs. Crosbie and her niece had gone out just before her. Might it not belong to the latter, whose name she had not yet heard? When she looked again at the torn cover, she observed, what had escaped her notice before, that the paper was intact after the syllable *ston*, consequently no *Esqr.* had ever formed a portion of the address. She rang the bell and asked for Mrs. Flaherty.

"Mrs. Flaherty, can you tell me the name of the youngest of your new lodgers? I think you said the aunt was Mrs. Crosbie; but the niece?"

"It'll be Alliston, or Illiston, or some sich a

name, I'm thinkin', miss. Annyways, she's a missis."

"Ah! so I fancied; and you know that it's a name ending with *ston?* That's all I wanted to know."

"I saw it wrote on a letter this mornin', miss; for she says to me, says she, 'You mind and be very partic'lar, Mrs. Flaherty, and bring me letthers to *me*, and not to me aunt;" so I took it up to her with these very hands."

"Then this letter, no doubt, belongs to her. Perhaps it is the very one you took in?"

"Sure it is, thin, miss. I mind there was that big blot in the corrner. If ye plase, I'll give it to her when she comes in."

"No, I will take it to her myself. I think she would rather that I explained to her how it was found."

Olivia could no longer doubt to whom the letter in her possession was addressed. She felt tempted for a moment to return it to Mr. Thompson, simply stating that the letter was not hers. The few words she had read of it indicated that possibly the clue to some secret of grave importance might be contained in the remainder. She did not believe that Mr. Thompson had read the letter, for he bore the stamp of a true gentleman; but he *might* have done so in his endeavour to learn for whom it was

intended. Was she to allow him to continue to believe that this person was herself? On the other hand, was she justified in delivering back into a stranger's hands so important a paper, now that she knew positively whose it was? She decided without much hesitation that she was not so justified.

She dropped the letter into a larger cover, within which she wrote, on a separate sheet, these words:

"Miss Marston presents her compliments to Mrs. Elliston, and begs to return her a letter found on the stairs this afternoon, and which was brought by mistake to Miss Marston. The torn state of the cover will account for this, together with the last syllable of both names being the same; but Miss Marston, seeing at a glance that the letter is not hers, loses no time in restoring it into Mrs. Elliston's hands."

Half an hour later the ladies returned; and Fritz, knocking at the door of the third floor, gave the letter to Mrs. Elliston herself.

It certainly in no way concerned Olivia what the new lodger's correspondence or past history might be, yet she could not avoid some speculation on the subject. She was puzzled, and rather annoyed, by the circumstance altogether: puzzled, inasmuch as the handwriting certainly seemed one

she knew; annoyed, because of the part she herself played in this, as regarded the lodger on the first floor. She said to herself that it was of little importance, after all, what this painter thought about her; but still she was annoyed.

By-and-by, with her shawl and bonnet on her arm, she stole from the room where her father dozed, to make her simple toilette arrangements defore dinner.

Just as she reached the first landing, Mr. Thompson came out of his room. He turned the key of the door, and pocketed it; he was leaving his apartment, as usual, for the day. Olivia hesitated a moment; then her foreign breeding emboldened her to do with perfect simplicity what to many English girls would have seemed difficult, if not impossible.

"Sir," she said, turning round, with her hand upon the banister, and her clear truthful eyes raised to his, "you sent me a letter to-day which you found upon the stairs, I think? I wish you to know that it was not mine—that it was not addressed to me. I did not trouble you with it again, for I learnt who was its rightful owner, and I have returned it to her."

This Mr. Thompson was an odd man. He bowed, and looked at her with a strange puzzled expres-

sion of face, in which admiration was blent with something else half sad, half cynical; but he said nothing.

He stood there for a moment, looking after her as she passed upwards; then, with a sigh, he went down the stair, and left the house.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LODGER ON THE THIRD FLOOR.

THERE was a knock at the door. "Come in," said Olivia. She was standing before the glass as the door opened, and Mrs. Elliston appeared.

Olivia looked at her visitor with some surprise. Mrs. Elliston was pale, but even prettier than Olivia had thought. She closed the door quietly, and drew near Miss Marston, lowering her eyes as she did so. Then she spoke, rapidly and somewhat indistinctly, for her voice trembled.

"You sent me a letter just now, Miss Marston?"

"I did."

"I am come here to implore a great favour of you. You read it; of course you did. You could not have known it was mine, otherwise. You are

kind—you are good—I know you are. Oh! for God's sake, don't—*don't*——"

"Mrs. Elliston, I read nothing but the first two lines of that letter. You may rest perfectly satisfied that I know nothing of the contents. Mrs. Flaherty recognised the cover of the letter, as having given it to you this morning. That is how I came to know it was yours."

"You are generous," said her visitor, shaking her head, and colouring. "You wish to spare me; but, oh! Miss Marston, I think—I do believe that I may trust you. I do not think, with that face, you would betray me. If you will swear to keep my secret, I will tell you all—*all*——"

"Stop. Pray consider what you are saying. I am a perfect stranger to you. I have no wish to hear your confidences. I repeat that I did *not* read that letter, and can assure you I know nothing whatever of your affairs."

Mrs. Elliston scanned Olivia's face keenly. Then, with the impetuous movement of a child, she seized her hand.

"If so, you are a wonderful woman. Not to read an open letter! But I am not afraid of you. Ah! if you would only be my friend. Do you know, I haven't a friend in the world."

"Not a friend? . . . . Are you not living with an aunt?"

"Oh, yes"—here she sighed; "but as to ever making a *friend* of her—as to ever telling her anything—you don't know what my life is with her."

"Is she not kind to you?"

"Oh, in her own way; but she is so stingy and straightlaced, and she leads me such a life. She hasn't a grain of imagination or enthusiasm, poor woman, and she can't understand anything. It's a dreadful trial to live with her. She worries me from morning till night, and I'm sure I can't help it."

"Can't help what?" asked Olivia, bluntly.

"Doing things she doesn't like. If she ever *was* young she forgets it, and expects every one to pass their life as she does, in preaching, and scolding, and praying. Isn't it hard to be *always* doing what's right?"

Olivia could not help smiling.

"Not only hard, but impossible," she said. "Why do you live with your aunt if you dislike it so very much?"

"Why, you see, I was still a girl when I became a widow."

"Oh! you are a widow?"

"Yes, that was more than three years ago; and they all said that I—I was too young to live alone, particularly being on the stage."

"You sing at a theatre, then, do you?"

"Yes, saloons and theatres I've *been* singing at —that was only because I was beginning, you know. Now they say I'm quite fit for the Italian Opera, only I shall never get an engagement if I don't change my name. I've a splendid voice."

Olivia smiled at this *naïf* announcement.

"And I'm so fond of it!" she continued. "There's nothing in the world I love so much; and when I act, I forget everything in the excitement. And then the applause afterwards! Only Aunt Crosbie is such a damper to one's spirits—she can't understand an artiste's enthusiasm. And *oh!* her preaching!"

"Poor little thing!" thought Olivia; "obliged to work for her bread, and, with this excitable temperament, condemned to live with a cross old woman—it is a hard lot."

Still the recollection of that letter obtruded itself not altogether pleasantly.

"Does your aunt go with you always to the theatre, Mrs. Elliston?"

"Generally, when she is not laid up with rheumatism. Will you go with me next time? Oh, *do*. I don't think Aunt Crosbie can go on Monday; she is quite laid up to-day."

"I never leave my father of an evening," said Olivia, quietly, as though the proposal were not an

unusual one. "But I can fancy that Mrs. Crosbie doesn't like your going alone. You are too young and pretty for that."

"That is what they all say," pouted the little widow. "It is better to be old and ugly, I believe, for then one is left in peace to do as one likes. Oh, dear me!" she added, with a piteous sigh, "I've had trouble enough, I'm sure. This life is very hard indeed to women who are not made of iron and granite. Don't you think so?"

Olivia looked into that rosebud face; it seemed strange that suffering should have left absolutely no trace there.

"All of us, I suppose, have our trials, men and women alike; if, as you say, we are not made of granite."

"Oh! as to men, I never pity *them*. A married woman, I suppose you think, oughtn't to say so? But I wasn't happy in my married life."

"It must have been a very short one?"

"More than two years," she replied.

The little woman's eyes were filled with tears, and again Olivia's heart-strings were loosened towards her. But as she did not see exactly what to say, she remained silent. Mrs. Elliston went on:

"I have suffered too much through men to have

much feeling or much opinion of them. But I have no right to intrude my troubles on you," she added, quickly, as though she had been surprised into saying more than she intended. She looked with those small but penetrating eyes of hers into Olivia's face once more, and then began a fresh sentence. "You are very kind to me. Few women would be so kind to another whom they knew nothing about. I wish—would it be asking too much?—I wish I might come and see you sometimes."

Had Olivia been a prudent English-bred young lady, she would have offered no encouragement to an acquaintanceship begun under such strange auspices. As it was, she felt touched by the forlorn condition of the little singer. Could it do her any harm to stretch forth a kindly hand towards her?

"We are very near neighbours," she began. "If I can be of any use to you at any time——"

"Oh! may I come and sit with you sometimes? If you will only let me come and talk to you about myself, when Aunt Crosbie worries me, you don't know what a comfort it will be."

"I am almost always with my father, and he doesn't see strangers," said Olivia. Then, because her kind heart felt for the young woman, she added, with a little hesitation, "but when I am alone,

if you want anything—if I can do anything for you——"

"Will you come and see Aunt Crosbie? It will be so kind of you, Miss Marston. I don't know how I can be bold enough to ask you, for she is *very* disagreeable, poor old soul! But she is laid up now, and it will put her into better humour with me, perhaps, and you'll see, too, what I've got to put up with. And then I can sing to you. I should like you to hear me sing. You haven't got a piano, I suppose? You don't know what an effect I make in 'Ah! non credea.' They said I drew tears from a Cabinet minister and two members of Parliament one night."

Olivia was amused and laughed, as she would at the vain but innocent prattle of a child.

"I shall like very much to hear you sing, but it must be in your own room some day. My piano is down-stairs where my father sits, and he doesn't see strangers. I have heard you, however, already through the ceiling, and know that you have a lovely voice. I have often wished my brother could hear you, he is so passionately fond of music."

"What! have you a brother?" said the little widow, opening her eyes. "I thought you were an only child. Where is your brother, Miss Marston?"

"A long way off just now. In the West Indies."

"And how long is he going to remain there?"

"I hope not many months. He is in Mr. Claxton's house, and they have sent Rupert on a special mission——"

"*Rupert!* and *Claxton!* Dear me, it must be the same young man! How very odd. Isn't your brother dark, with a hooked nose? And he has no whiskers, only a very small moustache?"

"Yes. Where have you ever met him?"

Mrs. Elliston laughed very merrily.

"Only once, in an omnibus, some months ago; but, you see, he made an impression. We never spoke, only he did stare so *very* much that I couldn't help noticing him more than I should otherwise have done, particularly as he sat just opposite, and was so polite in jumping out to help me, and in picking up all the music I dropped, and in hailing the other omnibus—the Highgate one—for me. Oh, I should know him anywhere again."

"But, after all, how do you know it was my brother? How did you find out his name?"

"He had a lot of letters and papers in his hand —law or business things of some kind, I suppose, for most of them were directed in a large clerkly hand—and sitting where I did, I couldn't help

seeing the address on one or two: 'Rupert Marston, Esq., at Messrs. Claxton's, Broadway.' "

"There can be no doubt about it," said Olivia; "and now I come to think of it, I remember his mentioning having met you. It must have been you from the description."

"It is quite like some sort of tie—some kind of introduction, isn't it? I must run away now, Miss Marston, for my aunt's dinner is waiting; but I am so glad to have made your acquaintance. And only think of its being all through that horrid letter. Oh! you can't tell how you have relieved my mind. I am sure you are a woman whom I can trust and make a friend of. Do, please, be my friend—won't you?"

She looked up once more in her pretty childish way, and Olivia felt more strongly than ever the kind of fascination which a seductive kitten exercises over certain natures—a foolish little animal, with not half the fine qualities of a horse or a dog, but asking to be caressed, and impossible not to be forgiven its tricks and petty misdemeanours.

She promised to call on Mrs. Crosbie the first day that she was free; and having extracted this promise, Mrs. Elliston departed.

CHAPTER XIV.

FROM JAMAICA TO LONDON AND BACK.

A FEW days later brought Rupert's first letter, by the mail which left Jamaica a fortnight after his arrival there. He wrote in good spirits, and gave an excellent account of himself. The climate at that season was charming, "and in three or four months," he wrote, "I expect my business here will be concluded and I shall be home again. Mind you tell me everything that happens, for I can't help being anxious about you. I wish you had some one woman friend near you; however, please God, you will not be left alone very long. My life here is likely to be very uneventful. The settlement of plantation accounts, the examination of returns, and invoices, and claims, fill up my

day. I have no society—no ladies' society, that is to say—but I have made the acquaintance of a right good fellow who is quartered here—Henry Pomfret. We met by accident, and I knew him at once from his likeness to his youngest sister. He is uncommonly handsome, and has that cheery off-hand manner which army men so often acquire, and City men seldom do. I have dined at his mess twice. He is as different from that poor creature Lionel as chalk from cheese. I am sorry to say he leaves for England in a few weeks' time, as he has sent in his papers to sell. Heirs apparent can't be allowed to waste their sweetness in Jamaica. He is going to join his people at Nice; but they are all to be in England in the summer, he says. Caverton is to be sold; Mrs. Pomfret dislikes the idea of returning there. They will probably take some other place in another part of the country."

In Olivia's answer to this letter, by the next mail, she wrote thus of her father:

"He sleeps more, and is more disinclined to exertion than formerly; otherwise he is really very little changed. He *can* walk as well as ever again, but always tries to avoid his little treadmill if possible. He is so patient—so unsuspicious. I have never had any difficulty in keeping all that

would be painful from him. He is certainly deafer, and takes less notice of things—that makes it easier. Don't be the least anxious about me. I never was better, and I assure you I want no 'woman friend,' though, in an unexpected way, one has appeared on my very narrow stage. We have two new lodgers *au troisième*, an aunt and niece; the latter an acquaintance of yours—at least you very vividly and faithfully described her to us some eight months ago. There is a puzzle for you! Do you remember a wonderfully pretty little person you once met in an omnibus, and came home raving about? She remembers *you* perfectly; even recollected your name, which she read on the back of your letters. We became acquainted by her dropping something on the stairs. She lives with an old dragon of an aunt, who is a Dissenter as far as I can make out, and, curious to say, the niece is on the stage—an odd combination. To complete the strangeness of this child-like little person's position, she is a *widow*. I could scarcely believe it when she told me. Her naïve vanity is so amusing! there cannot be any guile, I think, about such a nature; and her position with this cross old aunt rather excites my interest. So, in all probability, as the poor little thing seems very friendless, and grateful for any word of kindness, we shall often meet.

"Mr. Thompson is still a mystery. Except Mrs. Flaherty, no one has ever yet heard the sound of his voice. We have met on the stairs, and once I even spoke to him about something that had been dropped, but he only made me a solemn bow and passed on. I fancy Christopher Columbus in a shabby coat would not have been unlike our 'first floor.' I am glad you have met Henry Pomfret; it may lead to your renewing your intimacy with them some day. They have not answered my letter. How I look forward to your return! I am never sad or dull—you mustn't think that. I have plenty to occupy me, only it seems so cheerless of an evening to see your empty chair instead of you. . . . Aunt Clo comes here about once a week; she is much occupied now with a new, grand, and delightful friend of hers, Mrs. Quintus Smith. She asked me to go with a large party, headed by this Mrs. Q. S., to German Reed's on Monday last. Aunt Clo was very indignant that I was not duly impressed by the honour done me. She told me if I didn't 'mix,' I should never 'settle.' It sounds quite culinary, doesn't it?

"Father says that 'sending love' is a very absurd fashion. If people are properly attached, why, it is a matter of course; and if they are not,

it is merely a useless form. So he won't send you any message. Isn't that like him?

"Ever your most affectionate sister,

"OLIVIA.

"P.S.—De Castro and Montalba have just been here, to say they are off to Lisbon next week. They, too, suffered, as you know, through Lozados, and it is on his business that they are now obliged to go to Portugal. I am very sorry for dear father's sake, as they look in so often, and he likes their visits. You know how horribly both the good men bore me, so, personally, they will be no loss. I have always Mr. Claxton to apply to in any difficulty."

Six weeks after this, Henry Pomfret landed at Southampton. He fully meant to have called on Mr. Marston in London, and to have given him tidings of Rupert; but a telegram, announcing Mr. Pomfret's dangerous illness, summoned the son to Nice a few hours after his landing. For nearly three weeks had Mr. Pomfret been lying in the most precarious state. It was some months before Olivia heard from Mrs. Pomfret. Her husband was well again then, and her handsome and excellent Henry was with them; but all the anxiety of this illness, following so soon upon

the death of her beloved Lionel, had been almost too much for her. She wrote as though much broken down in health and energy. Though still surrounded by so many blessings, like Rachel, the poor mother refused to be comforted for the son who was not.

CHAPTER XV.

TWO AUNTS.

MISS PRINGLE is paying one of her weekly visits to her brother-in-law and niece.

She now lives in a small house in Bayswater, which she has taken furnished by the year, and where she gives frequent tea-parties, with whist, to such of her acquaintance as are open to these seductions. The house is in a region of new brick and mortar, and is reached from London through acres and acres of dry, uninteresting streets, but it is not far from Kensington Gardens, and it is eminently "a genteel residence,' so Miss Pringle is well contented.

She is often urgent on Olivia "to mix," and occasionally presents her with some impossible piece of finery as an incentive to that end; at the

same time she most scrupulously guards the secret of Olivia's present abode, though moved thereto by other motives than her niece's. But, indeed, it is not uncommon in life to see very different causes conduce to one result.

Let us hear what she says on this matter in the course of that morning's visit.

"My dear, who do you think I met in the Burlington Arcade this afternoon? You can't possibly guess. Your admirer, the big man, who used to trumpet away of an evening at the Pomfrets, and who rowed up the river so often and was vastly civil about the ball. What's his name? —Westbrook, that's it. He immediately rushed up; it was really very flattering, though I was rather embarrassed. I was looking at a bonnet in the window of that shop on the left-hand side going up—a sweet thing in pink—when I heard my name, and, turning round, found the big man bending over me. And really, in the Burlington Arcade, and altogether, I was quite—I scarcely knew whether—in short, I was a little *confused* for a moment, seeing people stare so as they passed at the meeting, which looked, you know—though, indeed, I should think they ought to be pretty well accustomed to that *sort* of thing *there*. However, he was most polite, and saw me to my brougham

(I was glad I wasn't in a cab); and oh! by the bye, he asked a great deal after you."

"You didn't give him our direction, Aunt Clo?"

She felt her heart beating quicker. Did she wish him to find her out? Of course not. Had she not herself sent him away from the Cedars? Nothing would annoy Rupert so much as Westbrook's coming here. Of course she didn't wish it; and Aunt Clo's reply, no doubt, reassured her.

"No, my dear—no. Living, as you do, at present, in such a very ungenteel quarter, I don't think it is to your advantage that people should know where you are. I can assure you I had great difficulty in putting him *off*, however, he was so very curious. I gave *my* address, of course, and I invited him to my next little evening party, where I said he would perhaps meet you."

The idea of Westbrook doomed to spend the evening among a set of card-playing old ladies, nearly made Olivia laugh, in spite of her vexation.

"But, Aunt Clo, you know I never go to you of an evening, so how *could* you tell Mr. Westbrook that?"

"Well, I didn't know that you mightn't like to come and meet *him*," said Aunt Clo, rather spite-

fully. "You used to like talking to the young man, I remember, and thought his trumpet delightful, I believe. And he rowed in a great heat several times to the Cedars, and you seemed to think him vastly agreeable, when he sat on the lawn and smoked—so I couldn't tell, my dear, that you mightn't like to see him again."

"If I had wished it, aunt, should I have taken any pains to conceal where we are living?"

"Why, as to that, one would be really ashamed to ask any one to come *here*, down in this low neighbourhood, by the river. I do hope, when Rupert returns, that you may be able to move to something a little more respectable, my love."

"Half the nobility lived here a century or two ago; Northumberland House is within a stone's throw of us."

"Well, my dear, I am glad *I* am not compelled to live here—that's all. I am sure, with my select circle of friends, I should lose half of them." (Olivia thought this not impossible, and moralised on the worth of such "friendships," when Aunt Clo had taken her departure.) "I never *could* expect Mrs. Quintus Smith, for instance, to come down here, and call on me. As to Mr. Westbrook, I know he's not a marrying man—his aunt told me so—besides which he has no money, so I never encouraged him, you know, my dear, beyond a

certain point. He was civil and useful, and so forth." (If Westbrook could only have heard her!) "And provided he don't insist on playing his trumpet, I think he'll be a great acquisition to my little party. He and Mrs. Quintus Smith will suit, I know—moving quite in the same set. So even if you don't come, it doesn't signify. For really, between you and me, my dear, his manner to me was almost *more* than cordial—what you call *marked*. He even inquired where I went to church, and I fully expect to see him there next Sunday. Indeed, I remember a man, some years ago, at Harrowgate, who went regularly to church, and sat in front of me, and always *turned round* to kneel down, that he might look at me, which was very wrong, and calculated to disturb his thoughts, so I always frowned and shook my head, though I often felt touched by the poor man's piteous look of surprise when I did so. Where do you go to church, my dear?"

The works of Miss Pringle's tongue had run down, so she took breath upon a question. It needed but a simple answer—a mere touch—to set that admirable machinery in motion again.

"To the Temple in the afternoon, aunt. In the morning I generally read prayers with father."

"Poor dear man! I shouldn't think *he* could follow much, eh? Your papa is terribly broken,

my dear. It is impossible to make him understand a word I say, and he does nothing but talk about the darkness in a way that is really absurd. His memory is quite gone, too. I was speaking to him of Miss M'Claverty's elopement, which created such a scandal when we were at Bath together with your poor dear mother seven-and-thirty years ago, and I was telling him I had seen her daughter yesterday, which I thought would interest him; but I found he had forgotten all about the mother and the coachman, and all the interesting details, which occupied the public mind so much at the time."

"Father never cared about gossip."

"As to that, there are, of course, different degrees of intelligence, and all people are not gifted with equally inquiring minds. But like the man in the play, my dear, your father likes to sup full of horrors, eh? Any gossip of a frightful or appalling kind he is still alive to, I observe. Indeed, I never come here, but he asks me whether there have been any bad accidents—which is hardly Christianly, I think."

"If more Christians were like him, the world would be a better place than it is," said his daughter, firing up. "He is kindness itself, and would not hurt a fly. But the manly love of adventure, which any one can see he had as a young man,

makes him still delight in hearing of hair-breadth escapes, from which courage and presence of mind have extricated men. You ought to have known him better, Aunt Clo."

"My dear, I know that he was always an excellent man,—no one can say I ever said a word against him—only the infirmities of age *are* very trying, eh? and he certainly is, eh? terribly broken—there is no denying *that*. You couldn't keep the state of things from him, if it wasn't so (and it is next to impossible that it *can* continue). I'm sure it must be a great strain upon you, my dear, and if it goes on much longer—this constant watching and waiting on the poor man, and this habitual life of deception—you will be worn to a thread. You are as thin as possible now, and your complexion is horridly yellow. Do you ever use the milk of roses I gave you? I shouldn't have kept my complexion as I have under so many trying circumstances (fancy that horrid girl, Jane, giving me warning *again* yesterday) if it hadn't been for that valuable wash."

"Your anxiety about my health is quite unnecessary, aunt: I am perfectly well."

"So you say, my dear; but it's a very unnatural state of things. I only hope it won't go *on*;" and she rose and shook her petticoats for departure.

"I don't know what you mean by an 'unnatural state of things;' and as to its 'going on,' I hope everything will go on *exactly* as it is until Rupert's return. Good-bye, aunt."

So the old lady went her way, having succeeded in irritating her niece by more than one of her little speeches.

She sat down and thought what she should do if Westbrook found her out, and called. It would be very pleasant to see him again; to hear that most musical voice saying even common-place words; to meet those handsome eyes once more. She did not deny it. But no doubt it was much better as it was. Still she thought a good deal about him all that day. He had not forgotten her. That is always a strong claim in a woman's eyes. She wondered whether he ever bore in mind what she had said to him the last time they met—whether he was an improved man—whether Rupert would always think as badly of him as he now did. She certainly thought a great deal about him all that day.

Olivia, according to her promise, called on Mrs. Crosbie. The stern, iron-grey woman, she had seen only once before, was seated on a horsehair sofa, having a cup of chamomile tea, or some bitter drink in her hand, which she seemed to be deliberately sipping. There was neither book nor work

on the table before her: only a silver watch—almost a clock in dimensions—stood there, in its case, at such an angle relatively to its owner, that her eye fell readily on the dial. She was an uncomfortable-looking woman, and everything about her looked hard and unpromising. The extreme hollowness of her figure and spareness of petticoat, joined to the sharp lines of her face, produced the same impression on her visitor now that they had done on the day of Mrs. Crosbie's arrival.

She glanced to the other end of the room: Mrs. Elliston was not there; but there stood her open piano, her canary, a large bunch of violets, a few ragged-looking books, and some woman's work. The contrast between the two ends of the room was as complete as between the aunt and niece who dwelt there.

"Mrs. Elliston is out, ma'am," began Mrs. Crosbie, almost before her visitor had entered.

"My visit was to you, Mrs. Crosbie—by your niece's request," said Olivia, rather shyly. "But perhaps as you are not well, you had rather——"

"You will excuse my rising. I can't stand; but take a chair, ma'am. You're Miss Marston, I suppose?"

"I am; and being in the same house——"

"My niece came down and scraped acquaintance with you about some book or other she had

dropped? She told me so much; and I'm glad she should have made some respectable acquaintance. I inquired of Mrs. Flaherty all about you. Clara picks up a lot o' people at the theatre that I never allow to darken *my* doors. I won't have no actors nor actresses here. That *she* knows. Sit down, ma'am."

"I hope you are feeling better," hazarded Olivia, after a pause.

"No, Miss Marston, no better."

"The season is very trying just now—so much fog. You will be better as the spring comes on."

Mrs. Crosbie gulped her chamomile, and said—

"I'm old, Miss Marston, and old people must have ailments. I'm only troubled about one thing—I can't go about and look after that girl when I'm like this."

"Do you mean Mrs. Elliston?"

"Yes; for all she's a widow, she's as incapable of taking care of herself as a new-born babe. Some people never *do* learn no sense."

"She is very young."

"Twenty-two," responded Mrs. Crosbie; "and that's old enough to have sense, I suppose?"

"Has she been long a widow?"

"Three years. Her husband was a poor creature, I fancy—never kept her in no order, and left

her without a farthing when he died. That's the way with most of 'em."

"Was he an actor?"

"Yes; that and his pretty face took the girl. I never saw him. I was out in Canada with my husband when they married. I thought it a foolish business when my sister wrote to tell me —and *she* was never troubled with too much sense, but it was no business of mine."

"They must have been married a very short time?"

"Better than two years. I came home when Crosbie died (my sister was dead too), and found this girl, her only child, a widow, without a penny. So I took her to live with me."

"That was very kind."

"No it wasn't, ma'am. It was my dooty; no more. But after a few months, as I wasn't rich enough to keep her, having nothing but my pension as Crosbie's widow, she went back to her singing, and to the stage. I suppose I needn't hardly say, it ain't what *I* like. The Rev. Mr. Sparshott is always at me about it. I make her listen to two or three prayers from *The Futility of Good Works* every day. Do you know that precious book, ma'am? Upwards of sixty thousand in circulation—price one and sixpence. Happy to supply you with a copy. Well, I can't do no

more for Clara than show her the danger of her paths."

"Are you afraid, then, of her trusting too much to her own good works?" asked Olivia—for this seemed the obvious deduction.

"It would be hard to say what they *was*," returned Mrs. Crosbie. "No, ma'am, but she's awful vain, and the Lord has given her a voice, and, except a pretty face, very little besides. However, the girl must make her living. *I* can't do no more than I do. *I* can't support her entirely."

"Of course: and there is no harm in singing, Mrs. Crosbie?"

"I don't think much of it *myself*," replied that lady, gloomily. "I've mostly found singing and bad company go together. And the worst of it is, I can't be always with Clara, though a widow of twenty-two *ought* to be able to take care of herself—there's no gainsaying *that*. But she takes as much looking after as a child—always running up bills, and forestalling her week's salary, and never knowing what she's got. There isn't a day that I shouldn't like to give her a good shaking for some stoopid thing she's done. She is enough to provoke a saint, she is. Sometimes I half make up my mind to leave her, and let her get on as well as she can alone."

"Oh, Mrs. Crosbie, I'm sure you'll never do

that! You'll never desert your niece, however tiresome and provoking she is. The more helpless or imprudent, the more she wants you, and you are too kind, I am sure, to give her up."

"No, I ain't a bit kind, Miss Marston. If I does it, it's because it's my dooty. I saw my dooty plain to Crosbie, and I did it for five-and-thirty year, though he wasn't a good husband to me—so I'm accustomed to worriting and bother, and to do my dooty, however nasty it may be. But Clara *does* try me, there's no denying that."

It struck Olivia that the widow's duty to her husband might be better fulfilled by observing a silence as to his demerits: she only said, however,

"Your niece is very attractive, and is sure to marry again, and then you will be relieved from this responsibility."

"That's just one of the things I'm most afraid of! She'll accept the first good-looking man who makes love to her, without ever thinking whether he can support her, or whether *she* won't have to support *him*. If he should have a tenor voice into the bargain, then it's all up with her. She's a fool."

Olivia could not help laughing: but Mrs. Crosbie continued, without the spark of a smile,

"Take my advice, young lady. Keep unmarried. When a woman is fortunate enough to become a

widow, it is the height of madness for her ever to dream of taking another husband."

Surely, thought Olivia, no two women were ever less fit to live together than this aunt and niece. How much better Aunt Clo would suit Mrs. Elliston as a companion. What a pity, the lively, frivolous, dressy old lady could not change places with this grim Mrs. Crosbie!

As this idea crossed her mind, the young widow herself was heard running up-stairs, and came bounding into the room, with the demeanour of a school-girl of fourteen rather than that of a widow of three years' standing.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LOST CLOCK.

HER cheeks were glowing from a rapid walk: her eyes were greener and more sparkling than ever. Her dress being "kilted" from the mud, over the brightest of striped petticoats, showed a tidy little foot and a neat ankle. She had a large roll of music in her hand.

"Oh! you dear, kind creature!" she exclaimed, running up to Olivia. "How good of you to come and see Aunt Crosbie, while I was at my horrid rehearsal, screaming my poor lungs out, and making myself such a fright as never was, what with the dust, *and* the exertion of going all round the stage upon my knees after that stupid little tenor, I don't know how many times!"

She ran to the looking-glass, and examined her-

self, smoothing her hair, which was ever so little ruffled, before she brought a chair to Olivia's side.

"That's a new muff, Clara!" exclaimed Mrs. Crosbie. "Pray where did you get *that?* Another extravagance, I suppose!"

"Well, I don't remember exactly what it cost, but I know it was very cheap. And I couldn't act the *Sonnambula* with red fingers, could I, Miss Marston? My hands were so cold as I walked along, that I felt it was quite a duty I owed to society to warm them. By-the-by, I've got *such* a lovely new song, the conductor of the orchestra has written for me. Would you like to hear it?"

"Surely you must be tired now? Some other time."

"You'll not have a bit of voice to-night, if you begin screaming again," said Mrs. Crosbie. "Do try and see if you can't sit still for five minutes. There was a man came to be paid for some flowers while you were out. *I* wasn't going to pay him. Such nonsense! What's the good of flowers, I should like to know?"

"Cari fiori," began Mrs. Elliston, warbling the pathetic air from the *Sonnambula*, as though that were a sufficient answer to her aunt's question; then, stopping short, after a bar or two, "Only

I've got to sing it in horrid English," she said, with a great sigh. "Listen, how bad it sounds."

She was an obstinate little woman, this widow Elliston, certainly. She ran to the piano, untied her bonnet-strings, and began. Perhaps she was determined that her new acquaintance should feel at once the influence of her strongest attraction. At all events she meant to sing: and she sang.

It was one of those lovely English voices, a fresh, full, clear soprano, unsurpassed in any country. It is true that half of it was lost in its passage through the throat, and some portion of the remainder behind the half-closed teeth. This is but saying that such cultivation as it had received had not been Italian. There was great natural facility; every roulade was as clear and true as possible; and there was something more than this, which no teaching can give, and without which all music falls dead on the ear. The soul of the little lady burnt passionately up through her song; she seemed to become ennobled as she sang; of a larger and deeper nature; such was the intensity of expression she threw into the music.

Olivia was amazed. Was this the same person she had been disposed to regard as a pretty garrulous little doll? In what depths lay hidden all these tender and stormy passions? Miss Marston had heard too much music, from her childhood (in Italy

and Spain) upwards, not to perceive that the singer lacked almost everything save what Nature had given her. But what was it all compared with that?

"You are made to be a great artist," she said, leaning over the piano, upon her elbows, and looking into Mrs. Elliston's flushed face, as she finished, and threw herself back in her chair. "You only want to study. You have been given a wonderful voice, and what is rarer still, a power of passionate expression. You must feel every note of that, to sing it as you do. It depends on yourself how much, or how little, you make of these great gifts."

This was not the sort of recognition of her talents to which Mrs. Elliston was accustomed. A compliment, prospectively less lofty, actually and unconditionally more positive, would have pleased her better, it is to be feared. A daily surfeit of flattery is unwholesome feeding. She tossed her gold hair back with ever so little a pout, and her small bright eyes flashed as she said:

"I was a pupil of the Royal Academy for more than a year, and then I learnt of Prodgetti and of Scrogini before I——"

"Prodgers and Scroggs," said her aunt. "No more Italian than you are."

"Well, I always used to sing in Italian with them, and that's what they call themselves; and I don't know why you should try and make out that I've not had the best instruction, Aunt Crosbie, when you know I've still got to pay Scrogini ever so much for the next year of my engagement, and —and——"

She looked very excited, and as if she were about to cry.

"You are so very young," said Olivia, gently. "You can't expect to be perfect until you have had more experience. Rome was not built in a day. If you go on studying, we shall have you singing at the Italian Opera I dare say, instead of these small theatres and saloons."

"They all tell me that song is perfect," she said, naïvely.

("What a fool you are to believe them!" muttered Mrs. Crosbie.)

"I know what it is! It is because I'm not on the stage. In the theatre I'm quite different. I can't sing here. I never could in a low stuffy room. You must come and hear me at the theatre. I'm in white, you know, with all my hair down my back, and they say I look very well."

"I have no doubt you do. I must be content, however, to see and hear you here, for there is no chance of my doing so in the theatre."

Mrs. Elliston's simple vanity did not disgust Olivia as much as a more subtle essence of the same quality might have done. It was still the child—a spoiled child if you will—whose *naïf* self-satisfaction disarmed severity.

"I am very fond of it," she went on; "it excites me so. When I get a passionate burst like 'grace, grace,' in 'Robert, toi que j'aime,' I feel all the blood through my veins. Only I've such a horrid little tenor to sing with—scarcely any hair on his head, and fat hands, without any muscle! It is impossible to fancy one's self in love with him: and that destroys a great deal, you know."

"What does it signify what the man's like?" cried Mrs. Crosbie. "You've got to sing to him, and he has got to sing to you, for a couple of hours, and if he has not got a hair left on his head, and is as fat as a pig, what does that matter to you, pray?"

Mrs. Elliston looked at Olivia, and shrugged her shoulders, as who should say, "You see what it is to live with a person who has not a grain of sentiment or refinement. There is no use in answering her"—and so she was silent.

"You speak Italian?" asked Olivia.

"No, but I sing it. Oh! if I could only sing at the Italian Opera—how I should like that!"

"Still," objected Olivia, "it is essential to

understand the language in which you sing. You can't give proper expression otherwise."

"Oh, I can make out enough for that, you know. Of course if I had the opportunity I should like to learn. I know I've a good pronunciation."

"Would you like to read some Italian with me? I think I might be of use to you."

"Oh, how kind! That I should. Every day, for an hour? And not *here?*" she added, lowering her voice. "I may come down to you, mayn't I?"

Thus a daily intercourse between Olivia and her new acquaintance was established. It was difficult to believe that these two women should ever become intimate; yet intimacy of a certain kind very quickly ensued. It was, in fact, so eagerly sought by Mrs. Elliston, that it would have been difficult for Olivia, having once opened the door, to keep it resolutely ajar. If it be true that in love "il y a toujours l'un qui baise et l'un qui tend la joue," it is at least equally so in friendship. Rarely, if ever, are the hands stretched out simultaneously; and, without very good cause for avoidance, it is only an unsympathetic nature that allows the outstretched hand to drop untouched.

In spite of her vanity, wilfulness, and other little similar defects; in spite of the somewhat disagreeable circumstance which led to Olivia's first ac-

quaintance with her, Mrs. Elliston continued to interest Miss Marston, and to induce her to make great allowances for her many shortcomings. "I have been knocked about the world like a foot-ball," she used to say. "I have never known a mother's care—never had any one to teach me anything, except music at the Royal Academy. All I know I have taught myself; and at seventeen I was told to marry my husband, whom I didn't care twopence about, and who didn't know what love was;—a cold——"

"Please don't say anything about your late husband. It pains me to hear you talk like that," interrupted Olivia, quickly.

The widow's introduction to Mr. Marston was very simply effected; and it was a circumstance that tended to facilitate the constant visits of this "neighbour" (as she was called) that the blind man took an uncommon fancy to her. She brought him books; she talked to him, and condoled with him upon the weather—the degeneracy in lamp-oil—the scandalous quality of fuel in the present day. He liked her blithe young voice; and Olivia was sensible of her kindness to the old man. But, indeed, she learnt that there was a great deal of kindness, and thoughtfulness too, in the apparently giddy widow. Olivia happened once to name a poor family in the neighbourhood whom

she used to visit constantly. It was one of the few out-of-door subjects of interest she possessed. The mother was bedridden; the father was a hard-working artisan, and there were six helpless children. Olivia taught the eldest of these children to sew; and any little shreds of work, or scraps from dinner that she could save, were carried to these poor people. Mrs. Elliston begged the next time to be allowed to go with her; and after that scarce a day passed without her bringing down to Olivia something—a slice of seed-cake, a couple of oranges, odds and ends of her wardrobe—for the sick woman or her children. Was all this from a desire to ingratiate herself with Miss Marston? Partly, perhaps; but let us give her the advantage of the doubt. It was pleasant to Mrs. Elliston to do kind or charitable actions—pleasanter, indeed, than to do strictly just ones.

Nearly three weeks passed. Almost every day Olivia found some hour, early or late, when she and Mrs. Elliston were both free, and could read *Le Notte Romane* or *Silvio Pellico* in the furthest corner of the sitting-room down-stairs, while Mr. Marston dozed by the fire undisturbed by the low hum of voices. Mrs. Elliston was no tedious pupil. Quick and clever in all she set her mind to master, the progress she made from day to day astonished Olivia, and encouraged her to continue

the kind task she had begun. The little lady was sometimes volatile, often tired, and once or twice tiresome; but she never forgot anything that Olivia told her: her ear was as keenly sensitive to accent as a child's, and her love of approbation stimulated her to imitate what she heard. They were very pleasant lessons to Olivia. The feeling, alone, that she was of use—that into her singularly isolated life, with its narrow round of daily duty, another interest, and possible good, had been brought—would have reconciled her to a less attractive pupil.

It was notable that as Mrs. Elliston grew intimate with Olivia, she shrank more and more from talking of the past. Sometimes she made a disparaging allusion to her late husband, like the one I have quoted, which Olivia always checked. But of the mystery which surrounded that letter she never spoke again. The confidence which a very little encouragement would have induced her in the first interview to give, there was no longer a disposition to offer. The impulse of the moment had been to tell all to the woman in whose power she believed herself to be. I think she hesitated for a long time to credit that Olivia had *not* read the letter: it was unlike anything in her experience. But as she learnt better that open and upright nature, and honestly clung to it, I do

believe, as to one of the few good things with which she had ever come into close contact, so she desired more and more to guard a strict silence as to all concerning her past.

Olivia, on the other hand, often pondered over the mystery of the letter, and wondered what the dark passage in this little singer's life could be. Though she discouraged her talking of her husband in the contemptuous terms Mrs. Elliston used, Olivia would not have repelled her new friend's confidence on the subject of the letter, had it now been offered. But it never was.

One day there came a knock at the door.

It was a gentle, deprecatory knock, which had to be repeated before it cut short the thread of Italian in Mrs. Elliston's mouth.

Olivia rose and went to the door. A dark, picturesque, somewhat evil-looking man, in the conical hat of the Abruzzi, stood there, with a fawning smile, and sharp, vigilant black eyes, that glanced quickly round the room, even while he spoke to her.

"Scusa, Signorina—cerco il Signor Ton—Ton—Tonson——", and he went on more volubly to explain that, overhearing his beloved "lingua" being read as he passed the door, he had made bold to knock, and interrupt the young ladies.

Signor Thompson, the painter, lived on the first

floor. The information was concisely given, and the man—a model, of course—with a lingering look at the room and its occupants turned away.

Olivia explained to her companion what the man had said.

"Why," exclaimed that astute little person, "should he knock at this door to ask something he knows quite well? I am sure I saw that man coming out of Mr. Thompson's room one day, a fortnight ago."

"Indeed!" said Olivia. "Then it must have been the seduction of your Italian that roused his curiosity to see what we were like in here. I wonder what Mr. Thompson is painting. The man hasn't a good face."

"I peeped in one day: the door was ajar——"

"My dear Mrs. Elliston!"

"I couldn't resist it. He had his back to me—had just come in. I saw a great canvas with some historical subject on it, and I think this man's head was just sketched in. He is a great bear, that Mr. Thompson."

"Why?"

"If I happen to drop anything on the stairs, he picks it up, bows in a glum away, and scarcely looks at me when I thank him, but stalks on. I wonder what he thinks himself!"

"What he thinks *you* is more to the purpose,"

said Olivia, quickly; "if you are in the habit of dropping things——"

She stopped abruptly, for the recollection of the letter flashed upon her. She had not meant to allude to it. She had in her mind the transparent coquetry of what she supposed to be the little widow's conduct, in dropping things purposely.

Mrs. Elliston did not wince. Neither did she seem to observe Olivia's sudden pause; but she changed the subject adroitly, nevertheless.

Three days later a very beautiful little clock which had belonged to Olivia's mother, and which Mr. Marston had the habit of *feeling*, whenever he stood near the chimney-piece, was stolen. The robbery must have been accomplished in the dusk, during the very few minutes that Mr. Marston was left alone. Olivia had gone to her room; Fritz was called into the kitchen, on some culinary consultation with Mrs. Flaherty. The thief, adroitly watching his opportunity, it would seem, had quietly opened the door, and without waking the blind man in his arm-chair by the fire, had walked off with the most valuable thing he could lay hands on.

The loss was discovered within a quarter of an hour of the robbery. Olivia was greatly distressed. She knew how highly her father valued this clock, and how he would miss it. Of the little that had

been saved from the wreck of their fortunes, this had been the first thing to be laid aside. He was not so deaf but that he could still hear it strike the quarters, and no other time was ever right for him but what this particular clock told. She never saw him go near the fire without his passing a hand over the case. It was something more than an inanimate object; it was a constant and a speaking companion to the blind man, sacred as having belonged to *her*, and bound up with endless memories of the past, that were hidden away from every mortal eye.

Olivia had a rapid consultation with Fritz, and to them was quickly joined Mrs. Flaherty. Who could it be? How could he or she have got into the house? The police? Yes, but first search the house. Might not the thief be concealed here still?

Rumour, wearing the shape of the maid of all work, flew up three pair of stairs, and bounced into Mrs. Crosbie's room with the intelligence.

Down rushes Mrs. Elliston, gushing over with sympathy, but more acute, in spite of her infantile garrulity, than any of them:

"The shaggy black man, Miss Marston! the model! The man who made you open the door!"

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. THOMPSON.

MR. THOMPSON had been gone some time. His door was locked. Where to find him? How to learn the address of that ill-looking model who certainly had been seen to enter the house—the maid now remembered that she had let him in—early in the afternoon? The police were communicated with; they came and examined the premises, and listened to a statement of the case. The thief—supposing him to be the man in question—had no doubt concealed himself under the stairs, after leaving Mr. Thompson, and watched his opportunity to enter the Marstons' rooms unperceived. Again the question, where was this Mr. Thompson? was asked with some impatience by the police. It seemed scarcely credible that Mrs.

Flaherty did not know where to find him; and when she further stated that his visits were quite uncertain, and that very probably he might not come to his lodging at all to-morrow, the chief policeman, by his manner, seemed really to suspect that this strange lodger himself might be implicated in the robbery. At all events, the only clue to the discovery of the Italian model was wanting; for the present nothing could be done but to institute an inquiry after such a looking man, and to send round to all the pawnbrokers, warning them to give information if the missing property reached their hands.

The evening was a mild one; yet Olivia made up a fire enough to roast an ox. Even Mr. Marston, who was generally so chilly, felt oppressed by it, and her end, for the moment, was answered. He drew his chair rather further from the chimney-piece, and did not once get up to raise his coat-tails, and warm his back. The evil hour might be only deferred, but at least the old man would sleep to-night, without the agitation which the discovery of his loss would have caused. She herself passed an anxious evening and a restless night. If she could only keep the knowledge of this from him until some clue to the missing clock was traced!

She was up by daybreak—up and watching at the window, the baker, the milk-woman, the post-

man, the few stragglers, even to a vagrant dog, who came along the sloppy pavement at that early hour looking wistfully down all the area railings in search of a bone. No policeman, no Mr. Thompson, and the breakfast hour stealthily creeping on.

She went down-stairs. She sat sick at heart by the window. Fritz came in; he had been already with the police that morning. No clue to the suspected man; no tidings of the clock. Olivia sent her breakfast away untouched. She dared not alarm her father by going into his room; he hated anything unusual. As the clock struck ten he came in, leaning on Fritz's arm.

"Very foggy; very dark. Will you be good enough to write my journal, Olivia?"

"Yes, father."

"Does the fog get into your head, eh? Make you feel stupid? forget everything?" He is feeling the mantelpiece as he speaks.

Olivia bites her lip hard; the moment, she knows, has come.

"Where—where is the clock?"

He turned his sightless eyes towards her as he spoke, while his trembling hand still fumbled at the chimney-shelf.

She had found it quite impossible beforehand to frame any words wherewith to break the loss to him. The Father of Lies now urged her strongly

to say that the clock was gone to be cleaned; but she resisted the temptation. With the courage of desperation, she blurted out at last—

"Some one has taken it; but we shall get it back, papa, to-day, I hope. We know—we are nearly sure who it is, and——"

"Taken—*taken!*" he almost shouted. "What do you mean, child? My clock stolen? What are you talking about, eh? Got into the house! Who did it?—who? Oh, my God! *Her* clock—*her* clock!"

He became inarticulate with agitation. Fritz almost forced his master down into his chair, and Olivia knelt at his feet taking his hand in hers, and pouring out such soothing words as her heart prompted her at the moment to speak. But the old man's excitement rendered him impatient of any caress. He pushed away her hand and kept plucking at the arm of the chair, while he moaned and muttered, "Her clock—robbed—stolen—the villain—who is he? How did he get into the house? Ain't there bars to the windows? Do you see that the chain is put up at night? *Her* clock! Haven't you a house-dog? And the plate—have you seen that all the plate is safe? Terrible—terrible! *Her* clock; the only clock in the house that went properly. Cost forty-five guineas at Geneva in the year '30, and never lost a minute

in the year. *Her* clock, too—ta—ta—ta! What are we to do now, eh? Send for the police? Let 'em search the coal-cellar and every hole and corner, Olivia. Offer 'em a—a—well—a handsome reward, do you hear? I must have the clock back, I must."

Olivia caught sight of a head she recognised passing the window at that moment. She ran into the passage as Mr. Thompson opened the hall-door with his latch-key and entered.

"Sir," said Olivia impetuously, "we have been robbed; robbed of a clock which is of great value to my father, and we have every reason to think that a model of yours, a tall, dark Italian, is the person who has taken it. Can you give us his address?" Her cheek was flushed with excitement; her eyes looked full into the painter's face as she spoke. No wonder he seemed taken aback by the unexpectedness and the manner of the assault.

"By all means," at last he replied, slowly. "But may I ask your reasons for suspecting this man, Miss Marston? He is a great scamp, I dare say, and not unlikely to be the culprit. I shall do all in my power to find him, but it is better I should know what ground you have for suspecting the fellow."

"Firstly, that he knocked at our door some

days ago under the pretence of asking for you, though, it appears, he has been constantly in your rooms. I observed that he looked round ours curiously, and from where he stood he could see the clock. Then, it seems, he came to you early yesterday afternoon, but the maid says that she heard the street-door shut gently towards dusk, and, looking out, she is nearly sure she saw this man walking away."

"Humph. This is somewhat of my affair, Miss Marston. I consider myself responsible that—that —no pains is spared to get back your property, and I have little doubt of succeeding. He certainly left me while it was yet full daylight. Be good enough to describe this clock minutely; the maker, and number too, if you can."

"The maker was Grohe. I am not aware that there was any number on it, but my mother's initials, L. O. M., with the date, July, 1830, were engraved on the back." She then described the size and appearance of the case generally, which was similar to that of thousands still fabricated yearly. Mr. Thompson at once saw that, except for the initials, it would be impossible to identify this clock from any other such by the same maker.

"My father is very much excited about this loss," said Olivia. "It would be a comfort, per-

haps, if you would speak to him for a moment, Mr. Thompson, and tell him you think the clock will be recovered."

He followed her into the parlour, where Fritz was assuring his master energetically that it was impossible the clock *could* be stolen—"voyons, m'sieu, c't juste imbossible."

"Il ne faut pas congtredire la raison, Fritz. Ong me l'a volé," repeated the old gentleman angrily.

"Here is Mr. Thompson, papa," began Olivia.

"And who is Mr. Thompson, eh? What has he got to do with my clock, Olivia? Is this a moment for visits, when my clock is stolen? What are all the Mr. Thompsons in the world——"

"Stay, my good sir. I'm not the man who stole your clock, but I am the next thing to it; I brought in the man who probably did, and I shall not rest until I find him, and your clock too. Make your mind easy."

Olivia saw herself now in a fresh dilemma. How to explain to her father this Mr. Thompson's presence and business at all in the house? She had forgotten that. The blind man looked bewildered, but his angry excitement had now an object to vent itself upon. He took up his visitor's words:

"It's easy to say 'easy,' sir. God bless my

soul! Brought a man into the house. And by what right, sir? what do you mean? Introducing a set of ragamuffins to cut people's throats and—and steal clocks in this way? Pray who are you, and by what right——"

Olivia's eyes had already implored Mr. Thompson's forbearance, and half explained the truth to him. The kindly, pitying look in the painter's eyes, as he bent them on the blind man, reassured his daughter. She now interrupted her father, apprehensive of what he might say next.

"Mr. Thompson has a room in this house, father. The person we suspect is a model he has been painting. I will explain it all to you afterwards."

But the old man's mind had already wandered back to its original grievance.

"Robbed. *Her* clock stolen; terrible—terrible! What am I to do, eh? It all comes of keeping the room so dark; scarcely feel the way to one's mouth. The confounded rascal must have taken it under my very nose. Where are the police? What are the police about, that they let thieves escape in this way?"

"The police are on the man's traces," said Mr. Thompson, "and before the evening we shall have both him and the clock; you may depend upon that, sir."

Mr. Marston listened like one in a dream. He had already forgotten who the speaker was; yet had a dim recollection that he had been told, and so leant back in his chair, muttering and moaning to himself, while Mr. Thompson left the room, followed by Olivia.

"You will forgive him, sir, I am sure," she said, "when I explain to you that he is quite blind, though he believes, or tries to make us believe, that he still sees. And he had paralysis just before his——before we came here, so we have never told him that this is a lodging. He can ill stand any shock now. That is why I am so anxious about this clock. I must explain your presence in this house as best I can to him, and you will come and tell us the result of your inquiries as soon as possible, won't you?"

"A quarter to eleven," he replied, looking at his watch. "I will send to you, or be here again, at two. And by that time you shall know what chance we have of success. Give your father something to make him sleep during the day, and before night——"

He left the sentence unfinished, for his hand was upon the street-door as he spoke, and he passed out quickly, closing it behind him.

"That should be an honest girl; or am I again deceived, and is she like the rest of them?" muttered the painter, as he hurried along. "It *looks*

a crystal nature, only that I have been taught, by bitter experience, to mistrust my discrimination in women. But what a head! I should like to paint it. The expression is even finer than I thought, until to-day, though I have watched her often, these months past, and have felt curious as to the girl herself. Yet, true to my plan of life, I avoided trying to find the answer to this riddle myself. Fate wills it that we are to become acquainted. So be it. We shall see if, in the long run, she prove to be all she looks. She can have no motive for playing a part to *me*—a poor painter, a middle-aged misanthrope;" and he smiled, more in sadness than bitterness, as the thought crossed his mind.

On the other hand, the painter's promptitude and decision in action had greatly reassured Olivia. His accent and way of speaking showed her at once that she had not been mistaken, that he was a man of education, and that, whatever the accidents of his worldly position, he was, in the true sense of the word, a gentleman. She was glad now that she had spoken to him herself, instead of sending a message by Fritz. There was something so kind in his manner, that she felt at her ease—almost on friendly terms—with him at once. So quickly, in those few minutes, had the barrier of five months been swept away!

In the mean time, this is what the painter did.

Having told the police all he knew touching the Italian, he hunted out a colony of models, organ-grinders, and Savoyards, living in the purlieus of Saffron-hill. The information gained here, after some difficulty, was unsatisfactory enough. The man in question was supposed to have gone to Paris in company with a band of *pifferari*. Nothing could be heard of the clock. It had not been seen by any of his companions; it almost certainly had not been disposed of before he left. Except the fact of the man's decamping, there was no circumstance elicited tending to throw the least additional suspicion on the model. After nearly two hours of fruitless inquiry, Mr. Thompson left the matter in the hands of the police, threw himself into a hansom, and told the man to drive him to Wigmore-street. At Grohe's door he got out.

There was a customer in the shop; he waited till this person was gone, then he asked to speak to the principal or foreman of the establishment.

"In the year 1830 a clock was bought from your house in Geneva," he began, and went on to describe the one stolen. "I am told it cost forty-five pounds. Do you know, or can you find out, the exact kind of clock you sold at that time for this price?"

"From what you say, sir, it must have been

similar to this. This has the same movement you describe, and the same sort of travelling-case."

The clock which was shown to Mr. Thompson corresponded in every particular with the description given by Olivia. One thing only was wanting.

"Engrave these letters for me here, on the back, do you see? Let it be done by six o'clock. I shall call for it at that hour, punctually. And get rid of that spic-and-span look: dull the ormolu a little." Then he went his way.

At two o'clock a line was brought to Olivia.

"You will have the clock this evening. Thief not turned up yet."

A sedative, surreptitiously administered, had made Mr. Marston sleep the greater part of the day. It was near seven o'clock when Mr. Thompson came, bringing the clock. Olivia ran up to him, with her face beaming.

"Where did you find it? Oh, how glad I am! And the wretched man, is he taken yet? I almost hope not. It is very weak, but I shall so hate any trial about it."

"There will be no trial, I think I may assure you. The man has certainly left England; that is clear. The clock I got, without any difficulty, from the shop where I found it."

"Well, it certainly has received no damage ex-

ternally during its escapade of twenty-four hours," said Olivia; "for it looks to me positively newer and brighter than it did yesterday."

"Probably cleaned and furbished up in the shop. Ah! your father is waking. Put the clock on his knee and let him feel it."

"Very dark," muttured Mr. Marston. "One feels quite confused; the fog gets into one's head, or something. Doesn't know where one is when one first wakes. Eh, what's this? The clock on my knee! What's the folly of putting it there? The mantel-shelf is the proper place for——Stay, I am losing my head, or I dreamt—I dreamt it was *stolen*, Olivia. Tell me if I was dreaming, child?"

"No, dear father, the clock *was* taken; you did not dream it; but you see it has come back quite safe, thanks to Mr. Thompson's kind exertions; and it has been cleaned, and looks so nice."

"Cleaned! It didn't want cleaning, and now there will be a bill to pay for that, and something for getting it back, I suppose. And have you caught the thief, sir? Make an example of him, sir. We'll prosecute him. I'll go into court myself. (What's that you're whispering, Olivia? —telling me to thank Mr. Johnson?) I wish I could see you better, sir, but the room is so confoundedly dark. I am greatly indebted to you for getting this clock back; but as I under-

stand that, owing to some odd arrangement, you have a room in my house, I hope you won't let any more of these foreign ruffians in—that's all. (He won't expect to be asked to dinner, will he?)"

The sentences in brackets were delivered in two very audible asides to Olivia, who knelt beside him, holding the clock on his knee. She looked up, with flushing cheeks, at their visitor, on whose lip was the faintest possible smile.

"You need have no apprehensions, Mr. Marston, from any more of my models. If I want one again, I will bring him into the house, and see him out of it. And as to this thief, we shall find him, sooner or later, and punish him, without your appearing in court; I have little doubt of that. He will be hanging about Rome, or Florence, or Paris, when I go there. That sort of vagabond never turns to a life of hard work in his mountains again."

"The ends of justice will hardly be answered by that—eh?" said the old man, with a quiet sarcasm. "And as to foreign police—*they're* no good."

"Then I shall be my own policeman (if I catch him)," said the painter, smiling. "As I was once, at Toledo."

"Eh? How was that? At Toledo? God

bless my soul!" said Mr. Marston, with great animation, "and how came that about, sir? Who was the man?"

"A servant of mine, who had run away from me three years before, at Athens, carrying off a hundred pounds I had just got at the bank. No use pursuing him—I knew I should fall in with the rascal again some day. It was the night I was leaving Toledo—I was in the cathedral, listening to the vespers—I suddenly perceived my old friend Giuseppe in suspicious proximity to the pocket of an old lady. I had no time to spare, or I might have amused myself by watching his proceedings. I went up to him—you should have seen the beggar's face. He made a futile pretence of not recognising me. I told him, if he did not follow me out instantly, I would have him arrested for attempting to pick pockets. It would have been inconvenient to me to have given him up to the police for this, or for his robbing me (even supposing that they would have paid much attention to me, which I doubt). I should, at all events, have lost my place in the diligence, and have been detained there some days; so I took the law into my own hands, as being the quickest and easiest course. I led him round to the back of the cathedral, and I thrashed him, until I was ashamed to punish the abject brute any more."

"Ah! very interesting, Mr. Johnson. Satisfactory, that. Terrible thing, a dishonest servant—terrible! Cut your throat before you know where you are—like Lord What's-his-name? No security when you lie down at night! Lucky thing for you, sir, that you left Toledo at once. I know those Spanish and Italian fellows—you'd have had a stiletto in you, as sure as your name is Johnson."

"Thompson, father."

"Very well, Thompson, then. And so you've been a great traveller, sir?—painting as you go along, I suppose; a knapsack on your back—eh? Well, *I* once travelled like that, when I was five-and-twenty. Then afterwards, when I had a family, we went about in a coach; and fine work I had to make them grease the wheels, and oil the leathers, and clean it all properly at night. I've stood over them for hours; but there isn't a foreigner who knows anything about a carriage—or a horse either, for that matter."

"Quite right there, sir," said the painter, who began to understand the old gentleman, and found a good deal of quiet amusement in humouring him—"quite right. It requires to keep a sharp look-out in such cases."

"You may say *that*, indeed! Very unpleasant things happened—*very* unpleasant, several times. I found the linchpin out of one of the wheels

once, just as we were starting. Why, sir, we might all have been rolled into the Arno, and the coach atop of us; we couldn't have swum out. And once I found a fellow coiled up with the drag, underneath the carriage, smothered in dust, but smoking his pipe, and letting us pull him up-hill, as coolly! . . . He probably was a robber, who was waiting his opportunity to attack us; but I presented my loaded pistol at him, and he took to his heels across the woods in double-quick time."

He leant back in his chair; Olivia had not seen him so talkative, so like his old self, for months. He certainly was the better for a visitor who would fall into his vein, and tell him of personal experiences that aroused his peculiar turn of interest. Mr. Thompson sat there, very good-naturedly, as Olivia said to herself, for nearly half an hour, relating such anecdotes as his tact showed him were likely to be relished by the blind man. And the clock was forgotten. As he got up to go away, Olivia suddenly exclaimed:

"You must have paid to recover this clock, I am sure?"

"Nothing, Miss Marston."

"My father, being practical, thought of this. I confess I did not, till he suggested it. You will come and see him again, Mr. Thompson? It will be kind of you—now that the ice is broken, and

that the thought of a strange visitor will not startle him. Your stories have amused him so much, I know. He will talk about them all the evening. Thank you so much for all your trouble.'

The old man wished him good night quite cordially.

"Rather an amusing man, that Mr. Jackson," he said, when his visitor was gone. He never committed himself to extravagant praise of any thing or body. Yet he talked of little else till he went to bed; asking questions about him which Olivia was quite unable to answer, and commenting upon the stories he had heard.

As Olivia replaced the clock upon the mantelpiece, her eye was attracted by the inscription at the back.

"It is strange," she said to herself, "I have not looked at it for a long time; but my impression—my strong impression—was, that the letters were roman, small roman letters, and *this* writing is in running characters. I can't make it out. The case, too—it is very strange;" and she fell to pondering, without being able to arrive at any satisfactory solution of the difficulty.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN WHICH TWO PEOPLE SPEAK ILL OF EACH OTHER.

From that day forwards, the painter was constantly dropping in for half an hour to chat with Mr. Marston, in the twilight. Sometimes two or three days elapsed, as heretofore, without his coming to his chambers; but, upon the whole, he was more regular in his appearance there; and, when there, he almost always asked if Mr. Marston would like to see him, before he left the house. The old man grew very soon to look for these visits, as the most amusing part of his day, and to feel himself aggrieved when three whole days went by without his hearing the sound of the painter's voice. It was a pleasant one, certainly, and his manner of recounting was good. He had

travelled much, and seen much of his fellow-men; that was clear. From whatever source he drew his daily supply of anecdote, whether from his own imagination or from old books (for he was evidently a great reader), the art of pouring it out, like beer, not flat and spiritless, but with a head on, was great. Olivia was as much delighted to listen as her father. How often, in after-years, she looked back to those hours, when a happiness was growing up silently and unobserved in her, day by day, and when, without a thought of the future, she let herself drift upon the sunny tranquil waters of the present, ignorant of whither they were bearing her!

Here is an extract from one of her letters to Rupert, in which, after telling him of the robbery, she went on to speak of Mr. Thompson:

"He is a very singular person. He gives me the impression of a life wasted by some great sorrow: I fancy he bears the stamp of it in his face. Not that he is sentimental or melancholy; on the contrary, he is at times very humorous, and his conversation with father is always amusing—only occasionally rather cynical, which I dislike. But he has strong and deep feelings, I am sure, under that grave, calm exterior; and in his satirical talk I often detect an under-current of passionate sadness. Father has taken an amusing

fancy to him, and, now that De Castro and Montalba are away, his visits are most pleasant and wholesome diversions for him, from the monotony of *my* very small talk. Of Mr. Thompson's past (or, indeed, present) history no one in this house knows anything. In spite of his old coat, he must be tolerably well off, from certain small indications, which a woman, of course, is sure to observe; and if painting be really his *profession*, he is certainly independent of it."

Not many evenings after the robbery, Mr. Thompson encountered Mrs. Elliston, for the first time, at the Marstons'. He did not look surprised, for he was a man who seldom showed what was passing within; but he listened to the little lady with a certain scrutiny, unmixed with the smallest pleasure or admiration. So, at least, it appeared to Olivia; and from an artistic point of view, at least, she had expected that Mr. Thompson must admire her pretty friend. The attention he paid Mrs. Elliston was that of a naturalist to the insect he wishes to dissect. He talked very much less when she was present; listened, and watched; and, like a skilful counsel, put an adroit question now and then, which "drew out" something he wanted. But Mrs. Elliston writhed under this process, for she was sharp enough to see what he was about; and she resented at once the obtuse-

ness to her charms and the cold analysis of her character.

"How you can stand that man sitting there and saying nothing, but smiling every now and then with those washed-out eyes of his, Miss Marston, I can't think! Such manners as he has, too, I never saw! I like artists in general so much, but this one really is too great a boor. It's very good of you to tolerate him—for your father's sake."

"There is no goodness in it, I assure you. For my own sake, I am extremely obliged to him for coming. I find his visits pleasant and amusing. Only when you come in, I think he likes hearing you talk better than talking himself."

"I am very much obliged to him; but I don't like a man who never says a word, but glares at one, and listens to all one says. He has one at such a disadvantage: and then he puts questions too; in fact, it is the only time he ever opens his lips. I wonder what he would do if I were to put questions to *him*."

"Probably, not answer them," laughed Olivia.

"Well, there are one or two that I *should* like to put to him, and if I meet him very often I think I shall. Is he married or single? to begin with. Then, how is it that no one knows where he lives?"

"It is not at all uncommon for artists to have studios away from their own homes, and I don't know why any of us should be particularly told where his is, and whether he is married or single. It is no business of ours. He comes to see my father out of pure charity; and to him we are utter strangers, of whose past he knows as little as we do of his."

"He knows of your *present*, however," said Mrs. Elliston, quickly.

"Not more than I do of yours," replied Olivia, looking into the widow's face.

She coloured, and the tears came into her eyes.

"Never mind," said Olivia, kindly, taking her hand. "Do not think I want to force any confidence from you—only allow other people to have *their* secrets, too. We none of us can ever know really much about each other in this life, I think. 'We see as in a glass darkly,' as St. Paul says. All the secret difficulties each of us has to encounter can never be known now."

"Ah! you are so charitable, so pure-minded! Dear Olivia!" burst forth Mrs. Elliston, seizing her hands. "May I call you so? and will you call me Clara? I have no friend in the world but you; and I do cling to you so much—ah! you don't know! Oh, don't let that man prejudice you against me. I know he hates me. I

know he does. Don't listen to him, if he abuses me."

"Abuses you? Nonsense, Mrs. Elliston; he——"

"Please, call me Clara."

"Well, Clara, then; Mr. Thompson is a thorough gentleman. He would not think of abusing a lady, whom he has never met but in our drawing-room."

"Ah! that is just it. I don't know. I am not sure that he may *not* have met me before; and because I'm a poor singer, who am obliged to earn my bread, he may think fit to say all sorts of things about me. Men are so ungenerous."

"Not this one, I think," said Olivia. "But if I am to talk to you as a friend, let me say this. You fancy Mr. Thompson has conceived a prejudice against you? If what you said, the other day, be true, I am not surprised. You behave more like a giddy child than a staid widow, dropping your things on the stairs, singing at the top of your voice, peeping in at his room-door—in short, to speak plainly, trying to attract his attention by every sort of device. I believe you do it out of pure gaiety of heart; but it is excessively foolish, and calculated to give the very worst impression of you to any stranger. A man of Mr.

Thompson's age has possibly very little toleration for such frolics."

The tears came again into the little widow's eyes.

"I'm sure I don't care how little he tolerates them, provided he doesn't turn you against me. But you're right, dear, I know you are; and I'm a foolish little creature—only I really think Aunt Crosbie makes me worse by saying everything I do is wicked; and I'm sure, with the dull life I lead——"

"Dull? Why, you have all the excitement of the theatre. I consider your life very dissipated, on the contrary, though I'm afraid not a happy one. This feverish restlessness, I suppose, belongs to your career; but you can never have any time for reflection, Clara; and living in a perpetual whirl, no one can be happy, it seems to me. During the few quiet hours of the day you are occasionally at home, do you ever sit down and think seriously of this life, which is gliding away, like water through your fingers?"

Clara Elliston's head was turned aside. She shook it silently.

"I never think," she said, at last, and in so altered a voice that Olivia started. "If I did, I should go mad. My only happiness in the past is mingled with bitterness: I can only live in the present."

"And the future? You are still very young: you have a long and probably a difficult life before you. Whatever is past, *is* past; whatever is to come you have the power of shaping, in some sense, for 'conduct is fate;' but by drowning thought, and living from excitement to excitement, you are preparing yourself ill to meet sorrows, and trials, and disappointments."

"I cannot help it. I am so constituted, that if I have not something to rouse and interest me, I am miserable. You don't know me; perhaps you will, some day. I am a wretched creature—full of faults and follies, dear; but I am to be pitied —I am, *indeed:* if you knew all, you would say so."

She cried; and then she dried her eyes; and five minutes afterwards she was mimicking her Aunt Crosbie, and laughing in that bewitching childish way of hers, which Olivia could seldom resist, though she often disapproved.

I think it probable that had Mr. Thompson shown himself the least attracted by Clara Elliston's pretty wiles, Olivia would have been less indulgent to her than she was. But she came to the conclusion, after watching them together upon three or four occasions, that the painter *was* hard upon the poor little widow. And, after that, she sought an opportunity of speaking to him about her. And this trait was very characteristic of

Olivia. There were things she disliked, and much that she could not understand about her new friend (as she must now call her), but her chivalry made her desire to break a lance in her behalf. Had Mr. Thompson admired Mrs. Elliston, of course this would not have been necessary. But Mr. Thompson did, clearly, not admire her; therefore Olivia spoke.

O. Have you ever seen Mrs. Elliston on the stage, Mr. Thompson?

Mr. T. Never.

O. Nor heard her sing?

Mr. T. I cannot say that; for it is difficult to be in the same house an hour with her, and *not* hear her; but I was never in the same room. I suppose it is what you call "a fine voice"?

O. What I call! Why, surely there can't be a doubt about it? It is a voice of rare power and beauty, and her singing improves every day.

Mr. T. Does it? I think she sings louder every day, which is no doubt the test.

O. I would give a good deal to see her act. I am sure she must act so well.

Mr. T. I have little doubt of it—such constant practice.

O. I see, by the expression of your face, what you mean, Mr. Thompson. You are prejudiced against her, I think. She is so very thoughtless

and giddy—so like a child. Why do you smile? I know her conduct is often foolish, perhaps even reprehensible; but she is of an excitable temperament, and then she has evidently never had much education—of course, I mean of the higher sort—and therefore great allowances are to be made for her.

Mr. T. Oh, if you go back to first causes, I have nothing to say, Miss Marston. No doubt you are right. Great allowances ought to be made, I think, for the man at the gallows, inasmuch as his early training was not what it might have been.

O. But there is real good in Mrs. Elliston, let me tell you, in spite of her little surface follies. I know one or two poor people about here, to whom she has been very kind. Then there is no end to her little thoughtful attentions to my father and to me. If she has had any flowers at the theatre, she is always sure to send me half; and the same with fruit, books, newspapers, that she thinks may amuse my father.

Mr. T. How does she get all these luxuries? Living in a garret, with that most repulsive old lady up-stairs, is it not somewhat strange that she should be so supplied?

O. She has not the least idea of the value of money, and is very extravagant. I often lecture her; but she always assures me that these things

are sent her by different friends—and of course I have nothing to say.

Mr. T. (*dryly*). I think a great deal might be said on that subject. But you know Mrs. Elliston better than I do—you are her friend.

O. Yes; I am her *friend.*

Mr. T. So I shall try and correct any false impression I may have taken of her. I have a mind to go and see her act to-night. Some suburban theatre, is it not?

O. Yes, the St. Vincent. Her engagement there ends this week, and she hopes to get one at this end of the town; but it is very uncertain. If she had but the money, she ought to go to Italy, and study there.

Mr. T. And you are teaching her Italian, meantime? You are an uncommon young lady, Miss Marston, to take all this trouble, and to defend as you have been doing as thorough-paced a little coquette as——

O. I thought you were going to correct your false impressions? And you evidently know my sex very little, if you think it strange that I should be good-natured towards another woman, or defend her when I think her unjustly attacked.

Mr. T. Allow me to remark, *en passant*, that I never attacked at all. You came into the lists, and offered to do battle in behalf of your fair friend.

As to my knowledge of your sex, this is what experience has taught me: that it is divided into two classes, the intensely virtuous, who have such a keen nose for vice that they smell it a mile off; and the utterly careless in such matters, who are too much absorbed in themselves and their own affairs (here he frowned) to think of attacking their neighbours—unless their neighbours interfere with *them*. These are not the women who would give up some hours every week to teaching one of their own sex, more especially if she were young and pretty, with every disposition to make the most of these advantages. You see, you put my calculations out: I can't class you under either head.

O. Are not all classifications mistakes? We vary as the leaves do on a tree. It is evident, however, that your ideas of women are based upon most unfortunate experiences, since you think they can be classed broadly under "the careless" and "the uncharitable." Owing to circumstances, I have been brought up more with men than women. Of the latter I know, indeed, very few; yet I know enough to belie your judgment.

Mr. T. You are right: my experience has been unfortunate, Miss Marston.

She felt sorry that she had said it; there was an expression in the painter's face she had never seen before. Perhaps he had an unhappy home? She

There was another pause; Olivia scarcely knew what to say.

O. And every year you find your profession more engrossing? How long have you been an artist?

Mr. T. I have only worked seriously within the last five years. I always drew, but it was only when losses—circumstances, in short—made me retire from the world, that I found Nature was my best friend, and my brush and palette my most trustworthy servants. I never tire of Nature. Books sometimes bore me; pictures often; people almost always; Nature never. I go out upon Hampstead Heath, and I find her as beautiful in her garb there as I do upon the Campagna. I travel abroad, but what is it for? Not for the galleries; not for the ruins of antiquity: it is for the varying aspects of Nature. She alone never disappoints me, though Velasquez and Leonardo often do. She, I find, always repays me, whether I wander on the lonely summits of the Apennines or the sunny plains of Provence, Styria, Switzerland, Spain—she greets me everywhere. Do you remember what Wordsworth says?—

> . . . . that Nature never did betray
> The heart that loved her: 'tis her privilege,
> Through all the years of this our life, to lead
> From joy to joy: for she can so inform
> The mind that is within us, so impress

With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us.

Mr. Marston, who had been dozing, here started up, and called for Olivia.

The *tête-à-tête* was broken up for that evening.

CHAPTER XIX.

SKIRMISHING.

Miss Marston found herself pondering over the painter's words, and wondering what his past history was, more persistently that night than she would have cared to admit. He called in the next morning on his way up to his work.

"I went to see your friend last night. She hasn't a face for the stage: it is all too small—eyes and everything; but she acts with tremendous fire, and has wonderful lungs for such a little woman. She made startling plunges with her voice, and fished up a deep note, every now and then, Heaven knows where from! And then she up like the last string of a fiddle—squeak, , until the excruciating sound was lost in vities of the brain. It was a more extra-

ordinary than pleasing exercise. Like watching a tumbler, one was painfully curious to know how she would ever get her voice down again, after screwing it up so high into her head."

"What's that you're talking about? The fog that's got into your head?" inquired Mr. Marston, leaning forward, with his hand up to his ear, to catch what he heard but imperfectly. "Did you say you'd been watching a tumbler? Tumbling is a very dangerous exercise, particularly in this dark, slippery weather. I remember seeing a man in Seville once, in the streets. He had a terrible fall —terrible: knocked out all his front teeth."

"Ah, sir, that was nothing to six brothers whom I saw in the arena at Nismes, performing a triumphal pyramid upon each other's heads. The fundamental base of this erection slipped, or caught his foot—down they all came! Three of them went up with Roman noses, which were flattened like pugs."

"You don't say so? Three Roman noses! Terrible, terrible, indeed!—ta—ta—ta. Have you heard of many accidents in the streets lately? You don't take the horses out this dark weather, I hope, Olivia?"

The painter looked at Miss Marston.

"No, father, we never take them out now;" and turning to Thompson, she added, in a lower

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"I should make but a poor man of business," replied Thompson; "but I have more than enough for all my wants, and, for the rest, I am very in-indifferent about money. You see, sir, I have no one to make, or to save for; and I have no sympathy with the man who 'heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them.'"

"Tut—tut—why, you're a young man still, eh? I don't see very clear, but so I imagine. You may marry yet, and have a family."

"You are mistaken, sir; I am hard upon forty; and led a married life of such supreme bliss for eighteen years that I am not likely to try and renew it."

Mr. Marston pondered on the sarcasm of the painter's words; his brow knit, his sightless eyes fixed on the wall opposite, and his lips parted, as was his wont when trying to solve some mental puzzle.

Olivia sat steadily stitching, without looking up. She wished he would say something more; she felt the most intense curiosity about his married life, but, somehow or other, she would not have shown this for the world.

The awkward silence was broken by Clara Elliston, who, with a preliminary knock, tripped into the room just then, kissed Olivia, bowed frigidly to Mr. Thompson, and went up to the

voice, "Do you wonder very much at my constant power of dissimulation? It is so easy, poor darling! to deceive him, and it saves him such a world of misery! indeed, I don't think he would survive the shock. Nothing else could make me carry on this sham of being something we no longer are."

"I am not of those who will think less of your truthfulness on that account," he said, with a friendly smile.

"Do you sell your pictures very dear?—make much money by 'em?" asked Mr. Marston by-and-by, suddenly.

"I can't say that I do," replied the painter, with perfect good humour. "You see, my style is the great historic, which isn't very marketable in England."

"Bad investment, that. You'd better change your style, then. No family to support, I suppose—eh?"

"None, sir, thank Heaven."

"Ah! that's lucky; better be in a house of business, though. I shouldn't wonder if my son were a partner in Claxton's house, some day; getting on famously—that's the sort of art that pays best—those are the sort of *figures* that return a man interest for his time; *he draws* them to some purpose—eh, sir?" and the old gentleman was mightly pleased at his own joke.

be glad to hear that I have at last got two pupils —Alderman Bloom's daughters. I went to see Mrs. Bloom yesterday, and she haggled about terms for a long time; but I wasn't going to take the two for less than seven and sixpence each, and at last she had to give in."

O. Oh! I am so glad.

Mr. T. And you thought Mrs. Elliston did not know the value of money, Miss Marston?

Mrs. E. (*still ignoring Mr. Thompson*). Mrs. Bloom is such a vulgar woman, my dear! The Alderman was Lord Mayor two or three years ago, and she has never recovered having been "My Lady" for twelve months. Fifty times, I suppose, in the course of my visit, she referred to that brief season of splendour. "When I was Lady Mayoress, I had *h*opportunities of 'earing the very best singing," she told me, and then she brought in a string of great names, to dazzle my poor weak brain.

O. That is a truly English kind of vulgarity: foreigners, I think, are seldom guilty of it.

Mr. T. Not in the same way, perhaps; but your mushroom barons and vicomtes make the most of their coronets. They plaster themselves over with them. And the value they attach to their wretched titles has no proportion to the money that they can be bought with.

Mrs. E. Can be *bought* with?

Here she turned round.

O. Did you not know that? Nothing is commoner.

Mr. T. Mrs. Bloom is just the woman who, if she lived in France, would purchase unto herself a coronet. Being a British female, she is confined to talk of the coronets she knows.

Mrs. E. But who—what kind of people buy titles? It sounds so absurd!

Mr. T. I will tell you. An example occurs to me. I knew a fellow in Picardy—he was nothing more nor less than a dealer in cattle—a very good honest fellow, of a good Picard family, and a true gentleman in his dealings. Well, he had the misfortune to marry. He only lived with his wife a few months; she was a vain, frivolous creature, who was literally consumed by the one idea of becoming a fine lady. She found, with her husband's views, this was impossible. She betook herself to Paris. There, by dint of interest and money, she got the title of count for her husband; and now—as a *Comtesse*—the summit of her earthly ambition would seem to have been reached. With classic laconism she wrote to her husband, "Monsieur, vous êtes un comte." He replied, "Madame, vous êtes une bête." He utterly declined to assume the title with which

she had invested him, and, to her indignation and disgust, sent round cards to all their friends, on which was printed, "Monsieur ——, marchand de bestiaux."

Both ladies laughed, and Olivia said she supposed it had not profited the comtesse much in a worldly point of view; for certainly, in England, if such a thing were possible, it would only meet with ridicule.

Mr. T. The comtesse is now one of the great ladies of Paris—not of the imperial circle, if you please—nothing so *parvenu*, but of the Faubourg St. Germain. So much for perseverance and determination, even in the case of a gibbering fool like this woman. As to England, I think civilised human nature is pretty much the same all the world over. Customs may vary—the rind of the fruit, so to speak—but the core of snobbism is there. We do not purchase titles (though, by the way, may not the coronets bestowed on our rich bankers and large landed proprietors, without the smallest merit of their own, be said to be purchased, in a sense?), but if the system were ever introduced among us, you may be sure it would not be ridiculed, provided only it cost *enough*. Money sanctifies all in England—renders all possible: it is power.

Mrs. E. There is a horrid old Jew comes behind

the scenes at the theatre sometimes. He makes me sick; and yet I see all the women, and men too, crowding round and laughing at his nasty jokes, and paying him such compliments; and they write him such letters! All because he is rich. He wears diamond rings, as big as marbles, upon his dirty fingers; and they say that kings and princes invite him, and that all the great ladies go to his house. You may well say money is power. Heigho!

"That was an honest sigh, at all events," thought Mr. Thompson; "a sigh after the diamond rings, and the loaves and fishes, scattered broadcast by this wealthy Israelite." Olivia sighed too, but he interpreted her sigh differently. Mr. Marston, not hearing what was said, hazarded the novel observation that it was dark—very; and that he wondered whether the lamps were lit in the streets.

Mr. Thompson replied it *was* dark, and that the papers spoke of an earthquake at Athens.

Mr. M. God bless my soul! You don't say so? An earthquake! Shocking, terrible, indeed! Many people swallowed up? Are there any particulars?

Mr. T. None, sir, as yet. Here comes your servant to take you out for a walk.

Mr. M. A walk? Nonsense! Such a morning as this!

O. Yes, father—just a little turn. You will find it much warmer out than in.

Fritz. Il fait bi'n beau, m'sieu.

Mr. M. Nong; je n'irai pas. Il fait trop obscur.

Fritz. Je fous garantie, m'sieu, qu'il fait beau.

Mr. M. Fritz, il ne faut pas congtredire la raison. Ong va se perdre dans ce bouillard.

The battle, fought afresh every morning, lasted some few minutes, but ended, of course, in the defeat of the old gentleman, who was led off a prisoner, to take his exercise on the sunny strip of pavement outside.

As he shuffled out upon Fritz's arm, it struck the three who watched him—but most painfully of all his daughter—that his gait was feebler, and his body more shrunk and bent, than it had ever yet been.

Mr. Thompson wished Olivia good morning, and went up to his work. But his work, apparently, did not prosper. It was the head of a woman, in chalks, to which he applied himself, as soon as he had locked himself into his room, and had exchanged his coat for a painting-blouse, and had lit his pipe, and had brought this head from the corner of the room, where it had been reposing with its face to the wall. He had been at work upon it, without a model, all yesterday, and the day before, and for many days before that again,

and had not succeeded in satisfying himself at all. It was a profile, somewhat too sharp in outline, perhaps, but nobly modelled, the putting-on of the head and column-like grandeur of the throat reminding one of an Elgin marble. The pale lustrous eyes, under straight brows of unusual darkness, had given the painter much trouble; but he had caught their character sufficiently to leave no doubt on the mind of any one who had seen the original, for whom the sketch was intended. So this misogynist could paint women, and take pains with them, too. Apparently, it was the institution of matrimony, and not the sex, to which he had an aversion.

"I'm so glad that man's gone, dear," said Mrs. Elliston, throwing herself into an arm-chair. "I never feel at my ease when he is present. I didn't choose to say so before him, but that old Jew has been persecuting me so. I might be covered with his diamonds now, if I chose — the nasty old wretch!"

Olivia turned sharply round, and looked at Clara, with a flaming cheek.

"What do you mean? Surely I must have misunderstood you?"

"Dearest Olivia, is it my fault if I attract men so? I never looked at the horrid old creature. And one of those Guardsmen wrote me a note, too.

I returned it unopened—I did, indeed; though nothing could be more gentlemanlike than his manner when he was introduced to me the other night. I wish I was ugly, I do. It's a positive misfortune to be stared at, and followed in the way I am."

"You bring it entirely upon yourself," said Olivia, angrily. "I have no patience with you, Clara. Your aunt is quite right. Look at your dress. You do everything to attract attention, and then you complain. Do you know, if I didn't believe you to be more like a silly child than a woman—a woman actually older than myself—I should give you up. I can't think how you can go on as you do. You put me upon thorns when Mr. Thompson is here."

"He and I are not the least sympathetic, dear, that's it. His is a cold nature: I am too warm and outspoken. I know I say a great many things I oughtn't."

"It isn't only the things you say—you *do* such strange things."

Mrs. Elliston put her pocket-handkerchief to her eyes.

"That horrid man has been prejudicing you against me—I see he has. Oh, Olivia, if you knew all—if you knew all—if you knew what I have to bear, you wouldn't be hard upon me."

She burst into tears—apparently real passionate tears. Olivia was moved to pity, as she always was when the little widow flung herself upon her mercy. And it ended as such scenes had often before, in Clara's contrition and promise of amendment: but in her telling Olivia plainly

"I wish heartily you were not on the stage," said the latter. "Keep to concerts, and give lessons: then you will be out of the way of this silly passion, which your foolish little head cannot stand. Art lowers and vulgarises any nature it lives in, all this stuff."

"I can't bear their talking to me. There isn't one of them I care twopence about."

"That is exactly what I complain of. You ought to marry again. You would be much safer and happier. But what honest man would like to marry a woman whom he sees surrounded as you seem to be, and drinking in all this adulation? I think you are capable of a strong attachment; and how much happier you would be away from all this excitement, with one man you loved and respected, in a quiet home, with children——"

Mrs. Elliston started up. Her face was very white: she was not thinking of dramatic effects now.

"Don't go on, Olivia—don't talk about chil-

dren, for God's sake. I can't stand it. There *was* a time when—I thought such a life—such happiness possible for me; but it is all gone—gone! No, my present life is the only one for me—when one has suffered as I have, to drown thought—that is the only thing!"

She sat down again, and buried her head in her hands. She was silent for some minutes, and Olivia said nothing, thinking it better to leave Clara now to herself. By-and-by the latter rose, dried her eyes, and presently stole a look at the glass, to see that she was not greatly disfigured; then she leant over Olivia, in a graceful attitude, and kissed her friend's forehead.

"How good you are to me! I'm afraid I don't deserve it. And yet I went to church twice last Sunday, and read a book of Aunt Crosbie's in the evening, upon 'Justification by Faith.' Do you hold that doctrine, dear? It is certainly much easier than 'good works;' so I think I believe in it."

[illegible]

[illegible] was a [illegible] [illegible] Mr. Harrison [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

precious, as tending to rouse and enliven the old man. Mrs. Elliston was like an impudent little robin, twitting and chirruping about him; Mr. Thompson, a mastiff, full of sagacity and strength. He welcomed each after his kind. Mrs. Elliston knelt down beside his chair, and made him laugh by recounting all the misadventures that befell her theatrical companions; how one, having split the most essential portion of his garments, at the moment of appearing on the stage, went through his scene without "changing front," and walked out backwards; how another, remarkable for his absence of mind, when enacting Macbeth, came on clutching a pot of porter, and exclaiming, "Is this a dagger that I see before me?" And then Mr. Marston, being kindled, would recollect stories of the great John Kemble, and Storace, and Madame Catalini, and tell them with much zest; after which exertion he generally slept some hours. By-and-by arrived the mastiff, and aroused him with terrible though friendly growls, telling of savage encounters, brave enterprises, and hairbreadth escapes. With this visit the blind man was always especially delighted; he grew more and more fond of the painter's society, though, true to his character, he never allowed this, and cautiously abstained from any extravagant praise of the individual. Thus:

[redacted]

"Oh! I don't know. I don't know about [redacted] a spendthrift any day; but he's pleasant man, certainly."

More than this qualified praise he never bestowed; yet Olivia knew perfectly well that, within her recollection, no man had ever crossed their threshold whose society her father enjoyed as much as he did Mr. Thompson's. He had never been of a gregarious turn: he had made few friends, and those few were all of the solid, foul-or-fair-weather kind; capital, honourable men, but in whom conversational delightfulness had no part. The painter formed a great contrast to these; and Mr. Marston would have owned it, if the habits of threescore years and ten had not been too strong for him. But he regarded laudation, or, indeed, enthusiasm in any shape, much as he did embraces, kisses, tears, and emotions of any kind whatsoever — womanish extravagances, unbefitting the caution and decorum of a sensible man.

March came—a bleak and bitter March. Mr. Marston caught cold. He could not shake it off for many weeks, and it still further enfeebled him. And after that he went out no more.

Rupert's letter, in reply to his sister's, wherein she had told him of the clock-robbery, and of the acquaintance they had formed with the painter, reached her about this time. In it he said:

"You know how desirable I think it that you should make no acquaintances in your present position; and I should have especially wished you

"How well Mr. Thompson tells a story, father! I know no one who recounts as he does."

"Ah! yes; well enough. A pleasant man, certainly."

"I observe you hear every word he says without difficulty. He has such a charming voice."

"I hear every word that every one says, if they speak *distinctly*. They needn't scream, like your Aunt Clorinda. You've got into a way of mumbling lately, Olivia, but I *used* to hear you perfectly."

"Yes, father; I must try and correct myself. I am so sorry Mr. Thompson is going into the country, and won't be here again for three or four days."

"Oh! three or four days? A pleasant man, certainly. Humph! Not much of a trade, his painting, I think: unless he is a Sir Thomas Lawrence or a Romney, eh? Where does he live? Leads a wandering sort of life, it seems. That runs away with a deal of money. 'Take care of the pence, and the pounds 'll take care of themselves.'"

"People who are always thinking of the pence are generally great screws, father; and I'm sure no one hates *that*, in reality, more than you do."

"Oh! I don't know. I don't know about that—better than a spendthrift any day; but he's a pleasant man, certainly."

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"You know how desirable I think it that you should make no acquaintances in your present position; and I should have especially wished you

to avoid intimacy with lodgers in the same house. Knowing your impulsive nature, I think I ought to have guarded you particularly against this; but the singularly reserved character of the 'first floor' seemed to render any such warning unnecessary; and the third floor was unoccupied when I left. Of course, now it is too late; and I can only be thankful that Mr. Thompson seems such a thorough gentleman, and that his visits amuse my father. Still, you must not feel annoyed if, as your natural protector (especially since I am at a distance), I look jealously at every one who approaches you, and if I say something which appears to you absurdly premature and groundless. But, remembering how completely blinded you were as to the character of a certain person, not many months ago, and that you showed—shall I call it a susceptibility?—then, which *might* have become something stronger, I think it necessary to caution you very decidedly against encouraging any romantic ideas about your 'Christopher Columbus in a shabby coat.' You will either laugh or be very angry, no doubt, as you read this. If you profit by it, however, I shall not care for that. This Thompson may be a very delightful person; I dare say he is: still I can't forget that you and I differed considerably as to the delightfulness of J. W. You know absolutely nothing

about this painter, and what you tell me you have observed sounds more mysterious than reassuring. For myself, I dislike mysteries. I love things that are above-board; and as I have nothing to conceal myself, I like to know something of the people I live with. Women are different: that cross between sadness and cynicism is always attractive to them; and mystery has a fatal charm. I do not see that Mr. Thompson could have done less than try to recover the clock, when he was in a measure instrumental in the robbery; and because a man is good-natured, and has the trick of talking well, it is no reason why one is to rush into an intimacy with him, without knowing anything of his antecedents. Nothing in the world would make me regret so much having accepted this appointment as to find that during my absence you had been led to fall in love with any one under these conditions. . . . .

"As to the little widow, so sweet and innocent-looking a creature *must* be harmless; and her living with the dragon of respectability you describe makes me easy about your acquaintance with her. I remember her distinctly. I wish I could hear her sing. Here I never get any music, and I thirst exceedingly for some. Our affairs drag on their weary length, and I see no prospect of getting away at present."

Rupert was right: his sister did not laugh, but she was a good deal annoyed, when she read his letter. To her father she omitted the whole of the passage transcribed, and filled it in with some extraordinary details of Jamaica, supplied by her imagination. When she answered her brother, two days afterwards, she dismissed the subject of his warning lightly, in this vein:

"As to Mr. Thompson, he has a dread of women in general (as he shows, by scarcely tolerating pretty little Mrs. Elliston), and a perfect *horror* of marriage, of which he had a sad experience for eighteen years;—so you see how groundless your fears are on my account! He is most kind; and dear father and I may really regard him now in the light of a friend. He is so constantly attentive and good to father, that I feel very grateful to him; but as to me, his manner and his openly announced opinion of married life would be sufficient to prove to you that there is no danger on my account. His society is really very valuable to us, and I should grieve very much if father were deprived of it; but you may be quite sure that Mr. Thompson has not the most distant idea of laying siege to your sister's heart, even if that citadel were as insecurely guarded as you seem to think. I am nearly a year older, however, and I hope several years wiser, than I was last May.

"I wish I could give a better account of our darling. These cold winds try him a good deal; and I am afraid he is decidedly weaker. Walking is such an exertion to him that we have given up urging it. We hope that with warmer weather he will regain his strength."

But the warmer weather came, and though the old man rallied a little, he never went out. The habit, once broken, could not be renewed. With loving eyes the faithful daughter watched him day by day. Before him she was always cheerful. Whatever dread or trouble she had at heart, her voice, at least, never betrayed it.

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THE MARSTONS.

THE MARSTONS.

A Novel.

(REPRINTED FROM FRASER'S MAGAZINE.)

BY

HAMILTON AÏDÉ.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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1868.

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250. v. 113.

TO

THE INMATES OF THAT QUIET HOME

WHERE I STUDIED, FROM THE LIFE,

ONE PORTRAIT IN THESE PAGES,

I DEDICATE THEM

IN LOVING MEMORY OF MANY HAPPY DAYS.

LONDON
PRINTED BY C. WHITING, BEA FORT HOUSE, STRAND.

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matrimony, I suspect," laughed Mr. Tharpe—and his laugh was not agreeable. "*You*, from experience, sir—'extra lutum pedes habes;' *I*, upon principle."

"Or the want of it," murmured his visitor. Then, aloud, "Do not misapprehend me, Mr. Tharpe. I have no intrigue with the lady in question. I have reasons for wishing to learn whether she is an honest woman, as I have reasons, also, for doubting the same."

"There are reasons for doubting every woman," sneered the barrister; "and, for my part, I believe some of the most honest often figure in crim. con. cases. They have sacrificed everything probably to one man. They have had what our neighbours call 'le courage de leurs opinions.' Whereas half the wives go on deceiving their husbands to the end of the chapter."

Mr. Thompson did not vouchsafe to say whether he agreed, or disagreed, with Mr. Tharpe. There was a slight shade of *hauteur* in his manner, as he said that, if Mr. Tharpe could help him in the inquiry he was making, he should feel obliged; and then he asked after his son.

"My son? Oh! He eats about three pounds of meat a day, and drinks his bottle of wine. He is six feet high, and he has a famous digestion. He rides pretty fairly to hounds, and he speaks the truth. There—I don't know that I can tell

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THE MARSTONS.

CHAPTER I.

STRANGERS IN THE LAND.

Not many miles from London stands a house on the edge of the great river. I will not point to the district more directly: let us call it Fordingham. The express train passing there brings business men to and from London in less than half an hour.

Four years since the house I write of was a moderate-sized villa, whose lilac-bushes and acacias fringed the river's bank for more than five hundred yards. From the water the house showed itself, like a coquettish beauty, by glimpses, behind the half-raised veil of two stately cedars. Between them and the house ran a gravel terrace upon which the windows of the living-rooms opened.

There was no pretension to architectural beauty—there had been originally no taste of any kind shown about the building; but the dwellers in it, at this time, had contrived to give it a pleasant aspect. A little balcony had been thrust out from the central window of the bedroom floor, which was always filled with flowers. Over the face of the two white walls creepers had been trained, from window to window; and in summer time a striped awning stretched its wide-armed shade over the flight of steps leading from the drawing-room to the garden. Here, of August evenings, a venerable old man and a girl might often be seen seated enjoying the river breeze, while on the lower step a young man lay at full length upon a rug smoking his pipe. The place in those days had essentially the air of a comfortable, happy home. I am told the house has spread forth two stately wings now, and has raised its crest a whole story higher, and taken unto itself a colonnaded front, while all untidy creepers have been swept away. In the eyes of the neighbourhood, the Cedars is "much improved." I doubt whether I should like it as well.

It is but ten minutes' walk from the railway station. Other villas surround it, mostly occupied by men whom business of some kind obliged to live within easy reach of London. It is a "Cockney"

neighbourhood. At the time of which I write, only one of the afore-named houses was distinguished by higher pretensions from the rest, in the title of "Park." Caverton Park was then an enclosure of some eighty acres, adjoining the Cedars. Nearly in the centre of this enclosure stood a large, frightful mansion, with conservatories, orchard-houses, and gardens of great extent, but little beauty. Here dwelt Mr. Pomfret, the richest and greatest man in those parts. But of him and his family we shall speak more anon.

The Cedars had been occupied for nearly a year. The gentleman who had taken it knew no one; nor was anything known of him at the time he arrived; and as it is proverbial that a more rigid solitude can be procured in a populous neighbourhood near London than in the most remote village in the kingdom, it is probable that the new-comer might have remained unvisited for ever but for two apparently unimportant facts.

Mr. Marston was a widower—old and blind, as it transpired—and he had but two children, a son and a daughter. It was "a great thing," as Mrs. Pomfret remarked, that there was no mother. The son was in Claxton's house (with him, some of the City men and a railway acquaintance); and as the father was clearly a man of substance, it was natural to suppose that the son's prospects were

good. He had a strong characteristic face, which some women thought handsome: he was under thirty; and he had the manners of a gentleman. What more could any mother of moderate expectations desire? Therefore, chiefly because there was no Mrs. Marston to push and fight for the interests of her daughter, and because the old man had a well-looking son of eight-and-twenty, the neighbourhood of Fordingham, headed by Mrs. Pomfret, was graciously disposed to extend the hand of friendship to the trio.

But—such is human nature—when it came to be seen that this hand was not seized with the alacrity which was looked for, then the spasm of cordiality increased twofold: there was no measure to the anxiety Fordingham evinced in pressing its hospitality on the new-comers. It might be that Mrs. Marston had not yet been dead two years; it might be that a foreign education indisposed the young lady, at first, for English society (since it came to be known that the family had been long resident abroad). From whatever cause, it was clear that the Marstons were careless of the social advantages Fordingham offered them. One or two sallow-faced men, with dark beards and doubtful linen, occasionally visited the Cedars on Sunday afternoons; and a lively old lady, in a yellow bonnet, had been seen on two occasions at the

window of a fly that was driving in. No one else was ever known to go there.

As to Rupert Marston, like most men who are hard at work all day, he was more inclined, on his return home, to fall asleep over a book by the fire, than to dress himself up to be agreeable to a set of people he didn't know. As yet he had but the most distant, church-door acquaintance with the ladies of Fordingham, and that diurnal railway intercourse with some of its men, of which I have spoken. But there was to be a change to this state of things.

"Mamma," said Kate Pomfret to her mother, one day, "I have a piece of news. You know the old lady whom we have seen in a yellow bonnet, driving into the Cedars? Well, what do you think? I have found out that she is a Miss Pringle, Miss Marston's aunt, and that she is actually come now to live at the Cedars. She arrived yesterday. Fanny Bligh says that Mr. Cassidy called on her mother this morning, in his round of the parish, and that he had just come from the Marstons, where he was introduced to this old Miss Pringle; and he said that she was remarkably talkative, and asked a great many question about the neighbourhood."

"Well," said Mrs. Pomfret, with a slight movement of the head, "perhaps they won't shut them-

selves up any longer in that ridiculous manner now. I must say I think that young man gives himself great airs—not choosing to dine out. Miss Marston, last Sunday, I saw, had left off her mourning. She is certainly a distinguished-looking girl—holds herself so well. I wish you'd had a few more lessons of Madame Michau, when we were at Brighton, Kate; you don't do yourself justice."

"I do so hope Miss Marston will come out now," said Kate, evading the question. "I think she looks so nice, if she would only let us know her."

"Yes, my dear," returned her mother, sighing, "and there are so few here with whom I like you to associate. I wish it, too, particularly on Lionel's account. I am sure, if he had more congenial spirits, he would not be so averse to society as he is. It distresses me very much, for I see it growing on him. He would hardly speak at all, you remember, the last dinner-party we had."

"He gets on very well with men, mamma; and I think," added the young lady, hesitating, "that he doesn't seem shy with those Miss Ropers."

"Don't mention the name of those vulgar girls," said Mrs. Pomfret, quickly. "I am grieved that he should have picked up an acquaintance with them. I can't think, with his refined mind, what

he can see about them;—but the fact is, he is so shy that any bold, forward girl has more chance than a really lady-like, retiring one, with him. Anxious as I am to see him married, I think it would kill me if he were to fall a prey to one of those horrid creatures."

"But, mamma, I don't see why you should be so anxious about Lionel's marrying. He is not so very old. Why, Julian Westbrook is three years older—four-and-thirty, isn't he?—and he is still considered very captivating by every one (but his first cousins), I believe. Of course, *we* don't find him so."

"If I hadn't *always* brought you up to look upon Julian as your brother, I shouldn't allow him to be here now, as much as he is, Kate. But he is not a marrying man; besides, he has been too much spoilt ever to fall very seriously in love; and as he will never have anything more than he has now, it doesn't signify, as it does with Lionel. With him it is a *duty*."

"That is a severe penalty on being an eldest son, mamma—to be dragged to the altar against his will!"

"Not at all. It only settles his position definitely for him, instead of his shilly-shallying half his life. It would be a great weight off your father's mind, and mine, if he were comfortably

and respectably married. Something *must* be done about him this year."

"What can you do, mamma?" said Kate, opening her eyes, and then laughing. "If you drive him to desperation he will be proposing to Miss Roper. Wouldn't Henry do as well, mamma? He will be home on leave next year. It strikes me, by-the-by, that Miss Marston is just the sort of girl he would admire. He likes slight, tall women, you know."

"I hope Henry will not be so foolish as ever to think of admiring any woman who has not a good fortune," said Mrs. Pomfret, in her quick, decisive way. "Second sons can't afford to marry just whenever the fancy seizes them."

"Nor elder sons either, it seems, for the matter of *that*," murmured her daughter, half aside.

"However, there's plenty of time for *him* to think of marrying; and I wish I was as sure of Lionel as I am of poor dear Henry, who runs a risk, really, of being spoilt with all the fuss that is made about his good looks. Lionel's, unluckily, are not a style that the world in general appreciates so much. Your father was saying to me to-day that if Lionel would only find some nice person——"

"You mean if some nice person would find him, mamma."

"He would double his allowance, and give him a house in town. But you see, just because he has everything that a young man can possibly want to settle comfortably, he seems to set his face resolutely against it. It is too provoking."

"Mamma," said Kate, presently, looking up, with a smile, "I think you'd better call at the Cedars this afternoon. It would be civil to leave your card upon Miss Pringle."

Mrs. Pomfret rang the bell, and ordered the carriage.

CHAPTER II.

AN ADDITION TO THE FAMILY.

MR. MARSTON was an old man of seventy-three, who had never been conspicuous for any great intellectual gifts. And yet his character was a rare one. Faithful, upright, simple; inwardly tender, yet having a horror of all outward emotion; manly in his devotion through life's best years to one object; manly in his resignation, when towards life's close that object was taken from him,—the foundations of the character were hewn out of solid and enduring material. Above this, again, Nature and the habits of threescore years and ten had erected a structure which was certainly original. The clockwork precision wherewith it pleased him that the events of yesterday should be repeated to-day, must have been violated in

any household less quiet, and less devoted to the master's perfect contentment, than that of the Cedars. The humour, which, it was said, his friends had delighted in when he was a young man still smouldered, and sent up sparks now and then, indicating where the fire had been. His ill-disguised delight in the narration of every terrible catastrophe, and every deed of daring, was another amusing trait which had survived youth and middle age. When reading the *Times* to him daily, his daughter often drew upon her imagination for a fuller supply of calamities than that journal afforded. The state of the foreign funds was, indeed, the only other subject of the daily press in which he took a sustained interest. Politics he had long ago done with. But this—the state of Spanish Bonds, Dutch Consols, and the like—it had become the habit of half a lifetime to study. Not that he really cared about money or money-getting—it was just a habit, connected in his mind with the idea of a sound, shrewd, practical sense. That was what he prided himself upon being—a shrewd, practical man. Yet, in point of fact, wherever generosity or warmth of heart came into contact with his boasted prudence, the latter virtue went to the wall. A kinder heart in secret, a warmer friend in time of need, it would be hard to find. But there were no fine

sentiments: of such he had a righteous horror. He was a little hot-tempered—a little difficult to manage sometimes; but his patience, under his great affliction, never flagged. In connexion with it the most singular fact about him remains untold. He never acknowledged that he was blind: apparently he did not know it. Whether he unwittingly deceived himself, or sought, by a loving fraud, to deceive those dearest to him, none could ever tell. The growth of this calamity had been so slow—its nature, as his family knew, was so hopeless—that the daughter's chief care, after her mother's death, was to break the force of the blow which she dreaded so much, when her father should learn that he was becoming gradually but incurably blind. When he first came to England, after his wife's death, Mr. Marston had still a glimmering of light. Six months later, even that little light was darkened. But he had begun by inveighing strongly against the fogs of our country, which on the brightest summer's day enveloped everything around him; and he still kept up the habit. He would complain fifty times a day that it was "very dark," and wonder whether they had link-boys in London streets in such perilous weather. No one could be cruel enough to destroy the innocent delusion, if such it really was. The lamp *did* give a very bad light; the

coals *were* very indifferent; all the household, to judge by their own accounts, lived in a constant fog, and groped their way by faith, like the master, from room to room. He had got to know the house well—that part in which he lived, at least —and the long terrace, which he trod, with the help of his servant's arm, for one hour every day.

Out of several children born to Mr. Marston, the two youngest alone survived. Rupert came into the world when his father was already middle-aged; and by reason of his mother's health, which obliged them to live abroad, the boy never saw England until he was sent over to Harrow. Mr. Marston did not greatly prize classical learning: he could not see that it had much to do with the practical side of life; but he had himself been at a public school, and he was a great man for precedent; therefore his son went to Harrow. When it came to be a question of Rupert's going to college, however, Mr. Marston pooh-poohed the idea. For a man who was not to enter one of the learned professions, what was the use of it? Rupert was to be a merchant, which was a sensible, lucrative calling; towards which, from certain circumstances, Mr. Marston's sympathies had been drawn for several years past. His uncle, who had left him all his property, had been a merchant in Lisbon. The successor to this uncle,

in the house, was one Lozados, who was a personal friend of Mr. Marston's, and with whom, at Cintra, he had resided, in habits of intimacy for many years. The house of Lozados was well known and respected, uniting, as it did, a great banking firm with one of the largest mercantile connexions in Portugal. Mr. Marston himself had never had anything to do with the business. When he was a young man his uncle had died, leaving him, unconditionally, a large sum of money. It had been optional with him to withdraw this fortune from the hands of his uncle's successor, but he had not chosen to do so. He had watched how the prosperity of the house (not without fluctuations, as revolutions and such like agitated the money-market) steadily increased; and he had resolved that his son should embrace a career which, with prudence and foresight, offered so many practical advantages. He was not to be brought up like a wealthy man's only son: no, he was to live thriftily awhile, and early acquire business habits. There were still living men who declared that in this Mr. Marston departed altogether from the precedent of his own youth. They asserted that he had once been a dashing young spark, renowned for his feats across country, and for his driving of a certain yellow Stanhope in the ring; but all this had

been before his marriage, and in talking to his son he ignored those days. It would have been natural, under the circumstances, that Rupert, if he was "to acquire business habits," should enter Lazados' house; but Mr. Marston, who had been obliged to live abroad so many years on account of his wife's health, remained a thorough Englishman at heart, and he had a great dread of his son's becoming a foreigner. He preferred, therefore, the young man's entering, upon less advantageous terms, a merchant's house in London, to the more brilliant opening he could have had in Lisbon. And certain undesirable love-passages with a fair lady there, when the boy was only nineteen, confirmed the father's decision, and hastened its being carried into execution.

The various phases of the young man's life had left their traces on his character. A boyhood at Harrow, with a wandering home in Spain or Italy, where he went for a few weeks from time to time; an opening manhood over a desk in the City, with an occasional holiday in the intoxicating society of some foreign capital, this had been Rupert Marston's life. He was by nature passionate and easily stirred, but he possessed a strong will; and his feelings were generally under the control incumbent on his father's son, and an Englishman bred at a public school.

He was not expansive; and, except towards women, he rarely showed what he felt. With them, even the very plainest, his manner had in it something chivalrous and protecting, which attracted old women and young girls alike; and he had got into more than one scrape in consequence. Women, in a word, were at once his strongest and his weakest point; and because he mistrusted himself, he had rarely sought their society of late, keeping resolutely in his narrow path of daily work with unslackening energy.

That was the secret of his character. Whatever he did, he did it with all his soul and all his strength. He had been eight years now in Mr. Claxton's house, and he was an excellent man of business, with immense powers of application, and a zeal which never slackened. In the course of a few years more, if his father chose to disburse a certain sum, there was very little doubt but that Mr. Claxton would admit Rupert as a junior partner into the house. And the knowledge that that gentleman had a high opinion of his son, and that he placed an amount of confidence in him rarely accorded to so young a man, were sources of just pride to Mr. Marston. The relations between Rupert and his father were not common. The latter still exercised his parental authority undiminished, although the former was, in consequence

of his father's blindness, almost absolute master to do as he pleased. Still, with forbearance and tact, he strove as patiently to bring the old man round to his way of thinking, and showed as much solicitude in obtaining his sanction and approval as though his father were still in the vigour and prime of life. In many respects Rupert was like his father; in his strong, well cut, aquiline nose, and deep-set eyes, no less than in his manly, robust temper, and in the serviceable, rather than showy, qualities of his mind. He was a man whom other men would find it difficult to "*do*;" but whom a woman—if haply he should fall foul of one so minded—might twist round her finger at pleasure.

Mr. Marston's daughter was seven years younger than her brother. In half an hour's walk through London streets you will see handsomer faces than hers, but you will not often find one you remember so distinctly many days after; one which sets you thinking, as this face did, about the character and story and future of its owner.

Her story hitherto was to be told in few words; her character can, at best, be only indicated here: it will be shown, as far as I have the power, in its strength and its weakness, hereafter.

She had been bred on the Continent; not bred after foreign ways, however, but by a fond and

careful mother, who was as English as she could be, in all the best sense of that word. Mrs. Marston had not thought of making her daughter brilliantly accomplished; and, indeed, except to read aloud well, there was no one thing which Olivia did better than other girls. She was a tolerable musician; and she spoke more or less correctly the languages of those countries in which she had travelled—that was all. If by "a good education," therefore, is meant the labour taken to acquire a great variety of knowledge, Olivia was certainly not highly educated. But in that teaching which fits men and women to bear their burdens in life—in those noble lessons which prepare the character to resist alike the enervating effects of prosperity and the shocks of adversity—Mrs. Marston had spared no pains with her young daughter. She died when Olivia was nineteen. It was the girl's first grief; and the brave help she brought to her blind stricken father, in this his sore need, was the first fruits of the mother's teaching.

But she was by no means a faultless young person; and the mother's training had only partially succeeded in counteracting the foibles of nature. The result was one that is not uncommon, when nature and education struggle for the mastery. She was what is called "very inconsistent." People who only knew her a little, could not understand

how any one so impulsive at times, should, at others, seem cold and guarded; how haply, when they looked that she should be angered, she was patient; and then again, why, suddenly, at mention of some disloyalty or wrong, the fire kindled in her cheek and eye, and she spoke words which, perhaps, had been better left unsaid. She was rapid in her decisions, which being founded on strong instincts of right and wrong, often lacked worldly wisdom; indeed, of this latter possession, she was (partly from circumstances, no doubt) singularly deficient. What will people say? was a question which it never occurred to her to ask; not because she despised conventionalities, but simply because her dealings with "the world" were so very limited that the thing never troubled her. She was always a little shy, a little cold, with strangers; she was not used to them; but there was not a particle of vanity or self-concern about her, and she very soon thawed. She had seen a great deal of life, and very little of society —which is a nice distinction. She had read a great deal, in a desultory way, and knew a great deal more than most girls of her age about all the complicated questions, the dangers, and difficulties of life. Love, save in the shadowy form wherein he presents himself to every woman, had as yet no place in her imagination. Of that great ruling

mystery in life she was, practically, more ignorant *than many of her juniors.* She lived very much in *a world of* her own, and felt small desire to interrupt the habits of seclusion which her mother's death and her father's blindness had brought about. What attraction could Fordingham neighbours have for her? She discouraged their advances, however, chiefly from the fear of anything that would derange her father's fixed routine of habits. She was his mainstay. All that was to be done she did. Her chief thought was how to spare him any addition to the heavy care under which his life was shadowed.

Except when she was gardening, or driving, or about some household duty, she was by his side. Rupert was off to the City early every morning; it was she who read the *Times* to her father; who wrote his journal (such a journal as it was! but he would have thought that heaven and earth were going to pass away had it remained unwritten); who brought him his cheques to sign; and who was constantly at hand to answer questions as to the weather. Their talk was of out-of-the-world things, and not such gossip as the Fordingham folk enjoyed. Of perilous escapes and marvellous surgical operations of the past, of queer characters whom he had met in his youth;—such were the

staple subjects between the old man and his daughter.

Of evenings, when Rupert came home, she always read aloud some stirring tale of adventure, or the explorations of the last African traveller. In such books Mr. Marston took the keenest interest, and was disappointed if anything occurred to interfere with the evening's reading. The only interruption which at all compensated to him for the loss, was the occasional visit of two old Spanish friends of his—City men—who often came down to dine at the Cedars, having a general invitation to do so. They were almost the only visitors Mr. Marston ever saw; he never talked or thought about the people who lived at a stone's-throw from his gate. Though very far from what is generally understood as an imaginative man he, too, dwelt in a world of his own—a world of the past; and such being the case, it was no wonder that the seclusion in which his daughter lived never struck him as uncommon, or undesirable.

This mode of life would have continued unchanged but for the arrival of a new inmate at the Cedars.

With that arrival, a more mundane element entered the house. Mr. Marston had no longer the uninterrupted benefit of his daughter's society.

[illegible]

[illegible] Mrs. Jarrom's sister [illegible] Mrs. Marsham [illegible] the same; the [illegible] dissimilarity of their characters. As [illegible] had permitted [illegible] the former they had met, but [illegible] the married lady's state of health and the unmarried one's dread of crossing the waters was [illegible]. It cannot be said that Mr. Marsham felt any very lively regret at this. He and his [illegible] did not suit; and during his dear wife's lifetime he was just as well pleased that the ocean should divide them. Now the case was different. All that was connected, however remotely, with his departed wife, had a value in his eyes. *Her* he never named, even to [illegible], but they felt the secret cause of many [illegible] his thoughts and opinions. So when [illegible] drove down to the Cedars for the [illegible] the Marsham's arrival from abroad, [illegible] surprised to see how cordially her

father greeted her aunt Clorinda. It was so long since they had met that Olivia scarcely remembered her aunt. She found a little lively old lady, very much dressed, with a flaxen wig, and great juvenility of manner; talking very fast, and chiefly about herself; addicted to society, a great fidget, somewhat of a screw; but in the ordinary intercourse of life, good-natured, and not given to evil speaking. Of course she was selfish; it would be fatal to all of us, having no creature on earth to think of but ourselves for five-and-thirty years. She was well off, but had no home; none of the small cares and burdens to be borne for others, which a home brings with it. Her own dress, her whist, the misdemeanours of a maid, who came into office generally, with a new wig, once a year, (that being the utmost period any woman had ever been known to stand Miss Pringle's "ways"); —these, with the performance of her duties to society, filled up the measure of her thoughts and time. She dwelt in lodgings—at Bath, at Brighton, at Harrowgate, and occasionally, as now, in London. She was delighted to see her relations again: thought Olivia "very like her poor mother," was overflowing in her recollections of the past, and appeared entirely to have forgotten that her brother-in-law had not always been quite as affectionate as he now seemed.

But Olivia knew her father so well that she saw, after the second long day Aunt Clo had spent at the Cedars, that the spinster's exuberance of talk was a sore trial to Mr. Marston. He was getting a little deaf—just enough to make it necessary for those who addressed him to speak distinctly; and Aunt Clo seemed never able to get rid of her words fast enough. Yet Mr. Marston's patience held out. Apparently he was resolved to compensate to Miss Pringle for all his sins of omission in past years. At last, one day, when she was gone, after having bemoaned her forlorn condition, and her solitude at such times as she was not in society, and the discomforts of a lodging, Mr. Marston turned to his daughter and said,

"I have been calculating. Your aunt is seventy next birthday, Olivia."

"Is she, father? She doesn't look as much."

"And it is very lonely and uncomfortable for her, living all by herself. She seems fond of you, I think—eh?"

"Well—yes—I dare say she is. It was very kind of her to give me those topazes yesterday."

"Your aunt wants to come and live with us, Olive. I'm sure of it."

His daughter said nothing.

"I think we ought to ask her."

Still she was dumbfounded.

"Shall you mind it very much, Olive?"

"I, father?—it is you. I mean—of course I cannot mind anything you like;—but——"

"I don't like it, Olivia. I don't pretend to like it. Your aunt gabbles like a magpie. I can't hear one word in a dozen she says. But she is lonely and old—and I think some one—some one who is *gone*—you know who, my dear—would like to offer her a home if she were alive. That is why I do it."

Then Olivia said no more. She knew that, however distasteful to her father, the thing was to be; unless her aunt should decline the offer. She did not decline it. She came, bringing a maid, and paying her due share of the household expenses. It was very characteristic of Mr. Marston, that after the great sacrifice he had made, he should charge his daughter to see that her aunt settled her accounts punctually every week.

The coming of Aunt Clo infused altogether a new element into that quiet household.

CHAPTER III.

MAKING ACQUAINTANCE.

"My dear Olivia, I cannot hear of your moping yourself to death in this absurd way, seeing no one. I have no idea of moping myself, I assure you. It is very bad for my nerves. Dr. Flaherty told me when I was at Harrowgate that social relaxation was half the battle, and we sat down such a delightful party every day to dinner at the 'Granby,' it quite assisted digestion, I'm sure. I always get ill when I'm alone."

"Well, you see, Aunt Clo, you run no risk of that here, as papa and I never go out."

"That's just it! It is perfectly absurd, a girl, at your age, shutting yourself up like this; why I—I—I'm not very young, perhaps, but I should consider it quite wrong—yes, *wrong*—to shut

myself up as if I were in a convent or monastery, or something. As to your papa, of course that is another thing. He would go about if he *could*, poor man, but he can't."

"Well, aunt, I can only say I don't feel as if it would amuse me a bit to go into Fordingham society. I shouldn't know what to talk about to the people. I don't think we should have many subjects in common; and, on the whole, I'm sure I'm happier at home here."

"Well, it is vastly ridiculous of you, and indeed I think it is quite selfish, Olivia, for I believe your father would be quite spirited up by hearing a little gossip about his neighbours, and seeing one or two occasionally."

"He was never fond of gossip at any time—now less than ever."

"Mr. Marston," said Miss Pringle, veering suddenly round in her chair, so as to face the old gentleman, "shouldn't you like a friend or two sometimes to drop in here? I'm sure you would."

"To drop *what*?" said Mr. Marston, with his hand up to his ear.

"Dear me! your papa's hearing gets worse and worse, Olivia. To drop *in here*—to drop you a *call*," she shouted.

"I'm not deaf, my dear Miss Pringle. I like people to speak distinctly—but you need never

scream at me. No, I can't say that I should like that sort of thing dropped on me at all hours. Olivia keeps these rooms so dark that it is impossible to see who comes in. And then the fog; it's as much as one can do to find the way to one's mouth. Does the fog get in your head, Miss Pringle, as it does into mine?"

"Bless your heart! Mr. Marston, there's no fog. It is a bright April day."

"Hush!" whispered Olivia, flushing. "You forget, Aunt Clo, we never contradict him about the fog." Then she said aloud, "It is a beautiful day, father, but we are too near London not to feel the influence of the smoke. Besides, coming from a clear sunny climate, as we do, of course it seems worse to us."

"Well, at least you will allow that it is quite warm, Mr. Marston," cried Aunt Clo.

"I should say it was both dark and cold," returned the blind man, "but I am glad if others don't find it so. Olivia," he continued, extending his hand over the fire, "these coals don't throw out any heat; you should get some more."

"I will put on a log of wood; that will make a blaze."

"Gracious! I must go to the window," exclaimed Aunt Clo. "The skin is nearly burnt off my face as it is. Do you use milk of roses,

Olivia? You ought to. It's the way I've kept my complexion as I have. And you shouldn't sit over that great roasting fire."

"My father likes my sitting here, and I don't feel it."

"Olivia," he said, turning round to her side, "when will Rupert be back? It is quite dark already—eh?"

"He will not be back for a long time yet, it gets dark so soon."

"Dark!" cried Aunt Clo (but she was too far for Mr. Marston to hear her), "why, we are going out to drive. How can you talk so? It is time to go and put on our things; the carriage will be round in ten minutes."

And Aunt Clo frisked out of the room.

"Father, we are going out for a short drive."

"Dear me! what can be the pleasure of driving in such weather? The coachman will be sure to lose his way, or drive you up against something, and smash the panels in. Why can't you stay at home? Home is much the best place in these fogs."

"So it is; but we foolish women like going out, no matter what the weather is. And John, you know, is so steady, there is never any danger with him. My aunt is anxious to return some visits that have been paid her, and she would be unhappy not to go."

"What a woman that is," muttered the old man, "never quiet for a single half-hour. There is nothing to be done, is there, Olivia?"

"Nothing at all, but to sit still by your fireside, and pity our restlessness in wanting to go out in such weather."

"I *did* take my walk, you know," he said, quickly. "And then you wrote my journal, and we did the accounts together. Did you send that pound to the soldier's wife you read to me about in the *Times*?"

"Yes, father, I sent it without your name."

"That was right. And you wrote my letter to Lozados? Well, then there's nothing more to be done. No cheque to sign, I hope?"

"Oh dear no," returned Olivia, smiling. "No cheques, nothing at all to do but to sit still. Shall Fritz come and be with you?"

Mr. Marston would never admit that he wanted any one. Hence his reply to Miss Pringle's suggestion of friends "dropping in." Hence, too, his invariable rejoinder when Olivia proposed his German servant coming to sit with him.

"Well, he can come if he likes; but remember, I don't want him, Olivia, and I'm not going out again."

But as his daughter knew, notwithstanding this protest, that her father found the old Alsatian

soldier, with his recollections of Napoleon and his stories of the retreat from Moscow, very pleasant company, Fritz was sent up-stairs.

"M'sieu feut se promener encore un betit beu?" asked Fritz, as usual, on entering the room.

"Ah! Qu'est-ce que vous me proposez là?" was the reply in good slow strong English-French, delivered with indignation, as though the proposal were quite unheard of, "Par ung pareil temps, Fritz . . . Ah!"

"Si m'sieu feut b'en essayer, il fait un temps doux, comme . . . de la pâte d amande!" returned Fritz, as he bent over his master.

"Il ne faut pas congtredire la raison, Fritz. N'est-ce pas que le brouillard vous monte dans la tête?"

"Parbleu, oui, m'sieu, mais—ça n'empêche pas —le zoleil va son train, tout de même."

And, after a great deal more persuasion, Fritz got his master out upon the terrace. There was always a grand battle to obtain this second walk.

Olivia, as in duty bound, accompanied her aunt in the round of visits the spinster was delighted to have to return within a fortnight after her arrival; but on this afternoon Mrs. Pomfret was the only lady they found at home.

They were shown into a large and very sumptuous drawing-room, where a stout comely woman

of fifty sat at work, talking to a young man who had all the appearance of being at home, as he lounged back on the sofa, with his feet upon a chair. A short, smooth, fresh-faced girl stood near the fireplace. She had apparently just come in from riding. Her hat was in her hand, and the end of her dark hair, slipping from its comb, had partially fallen.

"I'm delighted to be at home when you called," said Mrs. Pomfret, rising. "It is such a chance ever finding any one. Kate, my love, you know Miss Marston—my daughter, Miss Pringle—and Miss Marston, allow me to introduce my nephew, Mr. Westbrook. Is your brother at home, Kate?"

Kate was understood to say "No," while Miss Pringle looked round her, and kept exclaiming, "Dear me, what a beautiful house! Really quite a palace, Mrs. Pomfret; quite fitted for a *fête*, I'm sure!"

The lady smiled, and sank her voice into a confidential tone.

"We *do* occasionally gather our neighbours together, Miss Pringle; but to tell you the truth there are very few with whom we can be intimate here, and those we see more of a *quiet* way at dinner."

"With a rubber of whist, I dare say, afterwards?" suggested Miss Pringle.

"Exactly; or a little music, as the case may be. Sometimes the young people get up a waltz, when we get down a few gentlemen from London. Our society," she added, shaking her head, "is very limited. One is obliged to be particular, you know. *Such* people as we have coming here, and taking good houses!"

"Indeed?" said her visitor, with elevated brows. "Dear me! now, when I looked round in church and saw such a number of—of smart bonnets, and so on, I thought you must have quite a large society here."

"Mostly retired trades," said Mrs. Pomfret, mournfully. "Some of them not *even* retired."

Now Mrs. Pomfret's father was a soap-boiler. I have refrained from mentioning the painful fact hitherto; but the truth, sooner or later, must be told. Mr. Pomfret, who was a gentleman (though an uncommonly dull one) in every sense of the word, and a sleeping partner in a bank, had married Mrs. Pomfret, no doubt in consideration of her very large fortune. She had made him a good wife, and, according to her lights, she was an excellent mother. She had, besides, infinitely more brains than her husband. Her failings it is unnecessary to point out, for they lay upon the surface, and sometimes obtruded themselves, indeed, more annoyingly than serious vices might have

done; so that, in this manner, much that was kind and excellent was obscured.

"I dare say Mr. Marston feels, as I do, that with daughters, one can't be too particular, Miss Pringle. It is a great responsibility. With only a brother, too, to chaperone her. I can quite understand Mr. Marston's not caring that his daughter should make many acquaintance at first; but now that *you* are come, Miss Pringle, and can act as mamma, I do hope we shall see more of your niece."

"I'm sure you're very kind. I was telling her, only to-day, that I meant to break through her conventual habits. Quite ridiculous, a girl of her age, moping herself in that way, isn't it? And to do Mr. Marston justice, though he says he doesn't like society himself, I'm sure he would never stand in the way of Olivia's going out."

"Charming person she seems to be—so refined-looking, so unlike the common herd, Miss Pringle."

That lady evidently accepted this as a subtle compliment to herself.

"She takes after the Pringles, I believe; and there is a strong likeness runs throughout the family to the portraits of our great ancestor who was henchman to Robert the Bruce."

"*In*deed!" exclaimed Mrs. Pomfret, with great unction. "How very interesting! What a very

old family! Well, Miss Marston, I must say, has a great air of nobility."

"We are all said to have that *je ne sais quoi* which is seen in the portraits of the great henchman; but I believe my colouring, the colour of my hair, at least, is more like his than Olivia's; but then *she*, you see, has a touch of the Marstons."

By what process of reasoning the spinster contrived to believe that she was unadulterated Pringle (unless she could show that that race had bred in and in throughout all these generations), while in her niece the pure type was marred, it would have been curious to learn. Mrs. Pomfret was quite sharp enough to perceive this little difficulty, but her mind was held in thrall by the fact of her visitor's great antiquity—of family, and she forbore from any indiscreet question. The conversation between the two elder ladies gained strength and volume as it flowed along. It meandered through a variety of fields, but it never slackened; that little disclosure of the henchman had given it a marvellous impetus.

The "young people" were, in the mean time, improving acquaintance at the other end of the room. The gentleman who had been introduced under the name of Westbrook had sauntered towards the young ladies; but, as though he felt

himself too tall, or was too indolent, to remain standing at his full height—and he was nearly six feet three—he leaned, with his arms folded, against the embrasure of the window, and in this attitude occasionally dropped a word or two into the girls' conversation. He was well-looking, and better made than most very tall men are: broad in the chest and straight in the legs, with good hands and feet. The upper part of the face was very handsome, but the mouth, distinctly seen under the slight fair moustache, was not a pleasant mouth in repose, though when he spoke the fine even teeth and a pleasant voice obliterated its disagreeable effect. The manner was that of a man careless and lazy until roused—accustomed, probably, to conquest—and so completely self-assured as to render effort, restraint, or hesitation, entirely impossible with him. In a vulgar man this would have been insupportable, but Julian Westbrook was a gentleman. There was that about him which might attract or repel you, but his manner could never be thought offensive. Miss Marston having conceived of most Englishmen that they were shy, stiff, and ill at ease, was agreeably surprised with this specimen. It chanced that, after a while, Miss Pomfret asked her if she rode. Olivia replied that she had done so a good deal in Spain, whereupon Westbrook observed that he had

ridden through the greater part of Spain the year before. They fell to talking of different places known to them both, and this link once found, a chain quickly formed itself. Westbrook was roused. He had been to Cintra. He knew the house where the Marstons had lived for five winters. He even knew a merchant there who was one of their oldest friends. The interchange of reminiscence was so animated that Kate Pomfret found herself completely stranded and forgotten. When Miss Pringle rose to take leave her niece was quite surprised to find that more than twenty minutes had slipped away. Westbrook conducted them to the carriage.

"What a very fine man, Olivia," exclaims Aunt Clo, as the carriage drives off. "How I do like tall men! I wish Rupert were a little taller, Olivia."

"Rupert is quite tall enough, I think," said his sister, tetchy for her brother's reputation, even in the matter of inches. "He is nearly five feet ten. Those very tall men never know what to do with their legs."

"Well, *this* one had *his* legs most comfortably stretched on a chair when we came in," laughed the old lady. "I thought it quite a pity to disturb him. But I suppose he was repaid by talking to you. You seem to get on famously together."

"Yes," said Olivia. "We got on very well, for he knows dear San Salvador, and all my favourite walks at Cintra: and we found we had mutual acquaintances, too. I little thought ever to meet any one at the Pomfrets' whom I could talk to about the dear old place."

"Well, now, I hope you're obliged to me for making you come out of your shell. Mrs. Pomfret seems really a *charming* woman, and quite sociably inclined. And what a beautiful house! I'm sure they must have very nice parties."

"Do ladies in England wear flowers in their caps of a morning? She is good-natured, I should think, but rather oppressively over civil. I thought the daughter pretty—didn't you, aunt?"

"I can't say I looked at her much. I saw a young person in a Joseph, or something of the kind, who didn't seem to me to open her lips. You and the tall good-looking man—what's his name?—had the talking all to yourselves, Olivia."

"Oh, Aunt Clo! I hope I wasn't rude," said Olivia, colouring with compunction. "I was interested in talking about Cintra, and I'm afraid I forgot her."

In Mrs. Pomfret's drawing-room, meantime, the departed visitors were, of course, equally being discussed.

"Well, Julian, what do you think of our new

beauty? I am so annoyed that Lionel wasn't here. Such a good opportunity to have introduced him, and then he could have gone and called."

"Catch him, my dear aunt," said Westbrook smiling. "I can't say that I think he has had any great loss in missing the opportunity of being introduced to your beauty. He can see better-looking women any day."

"Oh, come, Julian!" laughed Kate; "that's rather good. I'm not blind, you know. You never look half as interested or animated when you're talking to Miss Wells, or Miss Bligh, as you did just now. You may say what you like, I'm sure you *do* admire Miss Marston."

"Do I, Kate? Well, of course, you know best. I grant the girl is thorough-bred-looking, and——"

"*That* she has every right to be," struck in Mrs. Pomfret. "The Pringles, it seems, are a *very* old family. Their ancestor was henchman to Robert Bruce."

"Oh," said Julian, dryly. "Well, the descendant of King Robert the Bruce's henchman is too sallow. There is something *piquant* about her face, but she don't carry enough flesh. That isn't at all the sort of thing for Lionel. He won't admire her."

"I didn't say that *he* would," remarked his provoking cousin, *sotto voce*. "What I said was that *you* did."

"I don't know when," said Mrs. Pomfret, ruminating, "I don't know when I have seen a young person who has taken my fancy so much. So distinguished—so *very* distinguished, Julian. And Miss Pringle is really a very nice lively old lady; a little vain, a little foolish, perhaps, but really very pleasant. I must ask them to dinner at once. Now, what day can you come down, Julian?—and we'll try and get up a little party; only, don't throw us over as you did last time, because your uncle doesn't like it."

"I didn't promise. When I promise I always keep my engagements."

"Hem!—well, I don't know about that. At all events, will you promise now?"

"Yes. Next Wednesday or Friday; either day is free," said he, referring to his engagement-book.

"Good. I will give them the choice; they can't well escape then. I must make sure of Lionel first, however: and remember, I count upon you."

CHAPTER IV.

DOMESTIC DISCUSSION.

OLIVIA was struck with her brother's manner that evening. She thought he looked anxious, and seemed preoccupied. Indeed, he took so little part in the conversation that even Aunt Clo, who talked too much to observe such things generally, had her attention roused to the fact; and, as usual, she did not hesitate a moment in communicating the result of her observation to its object.

"Why, what is come to you to-night, Rupert? You can't open your lips. I suppose you're in love. Come, tell us the name of the fair lady. It must be *that*, you know; because it's quite unnatural your sitting there when you come from town, and having nothing to tell us—not a word to

say—when we're expecting you to give us all the news.",

Thus rallied, Rupert laughed, and exerted himself to answer his aunt in a becoming spirit.

"You're quite right, Aunt Clo; you have an extraordinary gift of always divining the truth. I'm over head and ears in love with an enchanting creature I met in an omnibus. We had a shower just as I was leaving the City. I couldn't get a cab, and I didn't choose to get wet *out*side a 'bus, so I did what I particularly dislike, generally—got *in*. I was rewarded, in this instance, by sitting opposite the most lovely creature I think I have ever seen."

Olivia looked up from her work to see if Rupert was in earnest, or only inventing for Aunt Clo's amusement. She could not tell; but in either case she, of course, felt very sure that the anxious expression of his face had no sort of connexion with his omnibus beauty.

"Well, and of course you followed her? And who did she turn out to be? I was once in an omnibus myself, and I remember a man staring at me; and I was so uncomfortable because there was a woman with two babies opposite me, and another who would suck oranges, and the juice came over my black silk cloak, and I thought it was altogether very disagreeable; and certainly no one

with any sort of pretensions to—to *appearance* ought ever to go in one (indeed, if it hadn't been for the rain, I shouldn't, of course, have got into one then); so that I really pity your beauty, Rupert, if she was a lady."

"I tell you, Aunt Clo, she was simply divine. How can you institute a doubt, after that, as to whether she was a lady? Very modest; very quietly dressed; the loveliest little hands you ever saw, which looked as if they had been picking rose-buds all their life—no harder work than that. Then such hair and eyes! She got out in Tottenham-court-road, and I watched her get into another 'bus—a Hampstead one. That is all I know about her; but my peace of mind is irrevocably gone."

"Bless me! Why didn't you follow her, then, and find out who she was? I remember once being followed. It was at Tunbridge, and I was walking up and down the Pantiles; and every turn I took, the man turned also, until at last it became so conspicuous that I had to go home. I have reason to believe that the man learnt who I was, for he discontinued his pursuit after *that* (knowing, of course, that it would be hopeless); and indeed he had the good taste whenever we met generally to look the other way, which I thought showed great delicacy."

"Great," said her nephew. "But I showed

greater, for I would not follow my beauty at all. In the first place, I thought it would distress her to be tracked from omnibus to omnibus in that way; in the next, I knew you would be waiting for dinner, and I had only just time to catch the train."

When both Mr. Marston and Miss Pringle were gone to bed, Olivia, as she wished her brother good night, whispered—

"You are anxious, dear Rupert, about some thing—I do not ask you *what*; for if it were anything in which I could be of use, I know you would tell me."

"I will tell you, Olive. Though my trouble is not one you can understand, the difficulty in which it places me you will. I have reason to believe that it would be a very good thing if I could persuade my father to remove a large portion of his property from Lozados' house in Lisbon, where it all now is. But, as you know, this is just one of the few subjects upon which it is very difficult to talk to him. From the loss of his sight, now his mind broods over anything of this kind, and agitates itself so much upon any matter of business that I feel afraid of the effect of entering into a discussion with him on such a subject. Besides which, his prejudices on certain points are strong, and I doubt any arguments of mine having effect

in moving them. Still I feel it a grave responsibility to withhold from telling him what I think."

Olive stood still for a moment, the lighted candle in her hand.

"Tell him, Rupert," she said, decisively. "If you think it right, you musn't hesitate to tell him."

"But you always dread his being agitated, and you know the discussion is sure to agitate him. If I speak to him at all upon the matter, I must speak plainly."

"Mayn't it save him from greater agitation hereafter, dear? I never would say anything to worry him, unless it's absolutely right and necessary; but, then, I think—indeed, I'm *sure*—Rupert, one oughtn't to hesitate. Tell him to-morrow morning openly all you think, and leave me to tranquillise his mind afterwards as best I may."

Rupert Marston delayed going to town for a couple of hours on the following morning in order to have the necessary interview with his father. The old gentleman must not be disturbed out of his ordinary routine let what might happen. He breakfasted in his own room, and left it as the clock struck ten. Before that hour none but Fritz ever saw him. He would have looked upon it as ridiculous, and been annoyed had either of his chil-

dren in their anxiety after his health ever penetrated this morning sanctuary. At ten, therefore, on this morning as usual, he entered the library, his journal-book in his hand, ready for Olivia to make the litte entry of monotonous sameness which he would not for worlds have omitted. Rupert was here alone, waiting to receive him. Olivia had contrived, on some haberdashery pretence or other, to get Aunt Clo away to her own room.

"Good morning, father."

"You here? Why, how comes it you are not in town? Where's Olivia? Ain't she here to write my journal?"

"She is engaged with my aunt for a a few minutes. She will be down presently." Then, with a great effort, "I want to speak to you, father, about keeping all your money out of England—in Lozados' or any foreign bank. The interest they pay is very large I know, but there is a great feeling prevails in this country of the insecurity of these banks. Lozados is a great friend of yours: I am aware that you will be very loth to remove your money from his keeping; but all the men of business whom I know regard it as very unsafe to keep the bulk of one's property in such hands. I think it right to tell you this, father, as I have now of course more opportunities

of hearing the opinions of various classes of men in the City upon these subjects than you have. What I now mention is not only the opinion of Mr. Claxton: it is universal."

Mr. Marston was bending forwards, his lips parted, and his hand raised to his ear so as not to lose a syllable his son uttered. His cheek did not flush; neither did his eye kindle. A slightly sarcastic smile just touched the corners of his mouth. His son was amazed to see how calmly his father heard him to an end.

"There is nothing new under the sun, Rupert. I knew all you have been saying five-and-thirty years ago, when we first went to live abroad. The fortune your great uncle left me had been for years, as you know, in the hands of Lozados, who became his partner in the mercantile house, and I scarcely thought myself justified, when I inherited his money, in removing it from that house. I shouldn't think myself justified in doing so *now*, certainly. They have always proved punctual in their payments—honourable in all their dealings. I have never had any reason to regret continuing to bank with them, though, of course, I have been urged, over and over again, to transfer my money here and get one-third less income! No, Master Rupert, you can do as you please when I am gone, but as long as I live—it won't be very long—I

don't desert my old friends. Why, Lozados and I are just the same age."

"I am sorry, father"—and the son's manner showed that his father's words hurt him—I am sorry you should think I would not respect your wishes at all times—or that I have any selfish feeling in what I say. It is to spare you future anxiety that I ask you to consider whether it is not advisable to take at least a portion of your property out of Lozados' hands. He may be the most honourable man in the world, but he may be unfortunate. There exists a feeling in the City that his house is not very secure. It is known to have sustained heavy losses lately."

"So it did in 1834, and it tided them over. Every one said, then, it was in danger; but I wouldn't take a penny out, and perhaps I and a few others were instrumental in keeping him afloat."

Rupert was silent: then he resolved to make one more effort.

"At least, father, will you let Olivia's fortune be taken out, and vested in the hands of trustees for her? If she married an Englishman to-morrow, he——"

"There is time enough to talk of that when she does marry," interrupted Mr. Marston, raising his head. "At present Olivia doesn't seem anxious

to leave me, and where I think it well that *my* money should be, I believe she is content that *hers* should remain."

There was a slight reproach conveyed in the words which was not lost on Rupert. He felt there was nothing more to be said or to be done. He had expected to find his father difficult to persuade, excited, irritable; but he was not prepared to find him so ready to reply to every argument he had to adduce so clear in his views, so impossible to alarm, so tenacious of the purpose which he had held unchanged through all these years. He saw it was hopeless; with a sigh he left the room, and taking his hat walked out of the house without seeing Olivia. When she came down a few minutes later, in some anxiety as to how her father should have borne the interview with Rupert, she found the former sitting tranquilly in his arm-chair with an amused smile upon his face.

"Is that you, Olivia? I've had Rupert here, my dear, full of wise saws which he has picked up in the City, and trying to frighten me about my old friend Lozados. The boys in the present day amuse me; they are so mighty prudent and clever. Why, as I told him, they tried to make me take all my money out of Lozados' hands long before Rupert was even born or thought of, so I'm not

going to be terrified by that cry of 'wolf' now—eh, Olivia?"

"The wolf did come at last, father," said the girl, gravely. Then she came and sat at his feet, and took his hand between hers.

"What! Rupert has been trying to frighten *you*, too, has he?" exclaimed the acute old man. "Now, listen to me, child. For nearly fifty-five years I have managed my own affairs, and pretty well, too, I flatter myself. I've always been a careful man—you know my favourite proverb, 'Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves.' You act upon that, and tell Rupert to act upon it, Olivia, and not to trouble his head about Lozados. He is as safe as the Bank of England. He has been my friend for five-and-thirty years, and my uncle's before me. I am not going to give him up now for any boy's whim."

He spoke for the first time with some heat, and brought down his thin hand smartly upon the arm of his chair as he finished. Olivia saw, as her brother had done, that it would be worse than useless to pursue the subject further. It was so very seldom she had ever heard her father assume this tone, since age and infirmity had rendered him so dependent upon his children, that she saw at once it would be not only unbecoming but likely to make him seriously angry, if the discus-

sion were renewed. And however sorry she might feel for Rupert's anxiety, she could not but honour the noble trustfulness which prompted her father to refuse to withdraw his fortune out of the hands of his old friend. Yet this was the man who prided himself on his shrewd, practical sense; and held in horror all romance and sentiment.

To him, in the course of that same morning, enters Aunt Clo, bearing in her hand an open note, highly scented, and having an elaborate mauve-coloured cipher outside. Miss Pringle has manœuvred, in her turn, to get Olivia well out of the way.

After this necessary preliminary she sits deliberately down, with battering-rams and every other implement of war before the fortress, which she is resolved to carry either by a *coup de main* or by undermining, and all the slow artifices of a siege. She draws her chair close to her blind brother-in-law, and then she coughs in order that he may know that it is she.

"Very dark," observes Mr. Marston. "Does the fog get into your head?"

"Oh dear, no—yes, I mean—yes, very much, of course. But what I came to talk to you about now was Olivia, Mr. Marston — *Olivia*" (very loud).

"Don't scream. Well, what about her?"

"Why, you know, I am rather anxious about her."

"God bless my soul! why every one seems to be anxious about something or other to-day. It must be the weather. Why, the girl is well enough, Miss Pringle; what ails her?"

"Oh, nothing *ails* her, exactly. Her bodily health is good enough. She would be improved by being a little fatter, perhaps; but it isn't *that* —I was thin when I was her age. All the symmetry of my form came at a much later date, and——"

"Did it?" said Mr. Marston, gravely. By-and-by you shall tell me exactly when that was. Now, about Olivia. Stick to your subject, Miss Pringle. If it isn't her bodily health, what is it? You're not going to tell me she is in love? If so, it must be old De Castro, or Montalba, who is still older, for she sees no one else."

The blind man seemed mightily tickled at the idea, for he did then what he seldom did: he laughed.

"Ah! that's exactly it," struck in Miss Pringle, with alacrity. "You have just hit the right nail on the head, Mr. Marston. She sees no one else! Now, this isn't a natural or a right *state* of things at her age, and with her position and fortune, and so on; she ought to mix. Nothing is so good for

a girl as mixing. Mixing, I may say, does us *all* good; but young people really become brutes and bears when they don't mix—and then they've no chances! Not that *I* think marriage essential to happiness, of course, or I shouldn't have refused all the offers I did: it stands to reason. Only I shouldn't have known whether I really *preferred* remaining single if I hadn't mixed. How should I? Now, Olivia, you must be aware, knows no more of the world than a child unborn. She has actually never been to a ball! She is nearly one-and-twenty, and I don't believe she has ever been in a room with fifty people in her life! It is quite preposterous. The nearest approach to society seems to have been the very confined circle you had at Cintra—and now, here, since she has come, she has declined every invitation, and shut herself up from the very friendly, sociable people you are surrounded by. I really think, Mr. Marston, it is high time you should interfere."

"I can't force the girl to go out if she doesn't like it, Miss Pringle. I don't see that people are a bit happier for gadding about; I'm glad Olivia isn't as restless as some women are, never happy but when they are going somewhere."

"Well, for that matter, I believe Olivia would like a little society as much as any one. You must be aware, Mr. Marston, that it is entirely on *your*

account she declines going out. And I must say, I think her poor dear mother, if she was alive, wouldn't like her being shut up as she is, for I remember that no one enjoyed a ball more than Sarah did when she was a girl, and we both of us had more partners at the county balls than any other girls, and though some said that I was lighter than Sarah, yet——"

"There—there, Miss Pringle, say no more about it. I have never prevented Olivia's going out with her brother where and when she liked; but perhaps you are right. And that I ought to *urge* her going—perhaps you are right. Her mother was too great an invalid ever to go out, so we insensibly fell into these habits of retirement. We get selfish without knowing it," he sighed. "Perhaps you are right. She shall go out of an evening. I'll speak to her about it."

"You mustn't ask her whether she *likes* it, Mr. Marston. She will be sure to say, No. You must tell her you *wish* it, and that it will amuse you to hear all about your neighbours."

"But it won't; and what's more, she wouldn't believe me if I told her so. However, I suppose you are right. I suppose at her age she ought to go out, and," he added as if to himself—"and Sarah would have wished it, perhaps. If it wasn't for the fog—if it wasn't so confoundedly dark in

this country, I—I should go out with her myself, but—but I can't; *Sarah* knows I can't, so Rupert must take care of the child."

My dear Mr. Marston here am I *always* ready, you know, to supply the place of a mother to dear Olivia, and take her out, and give her the advantage of my knowledge of society, for I have mixed so much that I know at once what acquaintance it is desirable for her to make—and it is not every one who *has* the requisite *savoir faire.* Dear Rupert of course knows nothing of such matters. Now, there are the Pomfrets of Caverton Park, evidently quite a superior class of people,—powdered footmen and so on—and most amiable in their manners. I'm sure it was impossible to say more than Mrs. Pomfret did about Olivia yesterday; and I must also add, as was evident, that she took a very great fancy to *me.* The proof of it is, that this very morning comes this invitation to dinner next Wednesday. There couldn't be a better opportunity for Olivia's introduction. Mrs. Pomfret herself told me their dinners were very select."

"Provided they give you enough to eat, they might leave their selection to you," observed the old gentleman, grimly. "You had better sit down and accept it, and then that will obviate all discussion on the matter. I hate discussions."

Miss Pringle was quite delighted with the success of her stroke of finesse. She rose, saying:

"I will go and do so at once. There is a note, I see, for Rupert, but that he will of course answer for himself."

CHAPTER V.

AVANT, PENDANT, ET APRÈS.

Not until the answer was despatched was Olivia told of the invitation.

"I should be much happier spending the evening with you, father. I don't want to go to these people's house a bit. I scarcely know them. Let Rupert escort Aunt Clo, and let me remain at home. I can't bear your being left by yourself."

"God bless my soul! If a man of seventy-five can't be by himself for two or three hours he must be a poor creature, or have a very bad conscience, Olivia. I wish you'd get rid of that idea that I always must have some one with me. If you'd only get better coals and candles—that's all I ask. You do keep these rooms so confoundedly

dark it is as much as one can do to find the way to one's mouth."

"Dear father," said his daughter, looking at him with loving eyes, and shaking her head sadly, in her consciousness that he could not see her, "you must find it very dark, I'm sure; and that is why your children, who are young and strong, don't like to leave you; not that you cannot stand solitude, father, better than any one—not that—oh, no."

She stooped down, and kissed his forehead; but he only suffered this little approach to sentiment under protest.

"There—there—that will do now. Where's the paper? You didn't finish it, did you? You read the City article, and about the fire at Leeds—awful, to be sure! A terrible calamity!—any other news?"

"Well, here is a paragraph entitled 'A Strange Visitor. The little town of —— was thrown into a state of commotion on Saturday last by the appearance of a bear at large in the streets. The inhabitants, it may be imagined, fled in all directions, and it was not without considerable difficulty and peril that the unwelcome stranger was captured. This was effected at last, by some one from a first-floor window flinging a net over Bruin, and, during his efforts to disentangle him-

self, the chain which he had broken was made once more secure around his neck. It appears that an enterprising hairdresser had made this singular purchase the previous day from a travelling menagerie overstocked with bears, meaning to kill and extract the grease from this inhabitant of the Polar regions. As may be surmised, the inhabitants of ——, taking the law into their own hands, insisted upon the hairdresser's at once fulfilling his intentions, and Bruin was despatched without further loss of time.' "

"Horrible! What a predicament—meeting a bear, in a *cul-de-sac*, we'll say, without a chance of escape! If one clambered up a water-pipe, why the bear would come after one, and of course nobody would open a door or a window to let one in. No one was killed, then?"

"No, apparently not; but here is a garotte robbery, in which the sufferer has been fearfully wounded. 'On Tuesday night last, as a gentleman named Hilman was walking down Baker-street, at eleven o'clock, he was met by——' "

"Olivia, my dear!" cries Miss Pringle, entering the room in a fume, "do come and give me your advice. I am terribly put out. That stupid creature of mine has been and mistaken the order I gave her so *distinctly*, and trimmed my——"

"Well?" said Mr. Marston, impatiently, "go on; what was he met by?"

"My new green satin gown——"

"*What?*" he inquired again, yet more impatiently.

"With black instead of white lace!" screamed Aunt Clo. "And it's *cut*—that is the worst of it—all round the *neck, and the arms too*—oh, it's abominable!"

"What the deuce is your aunt talking about? Who is it that is cut round the neck, and the arms, too? I wish people would speak distinctly. The robber couldn't have had time to maim him in that way, in the street."

Olivia laughed heartily.

"It's my aunt's dress she is talking of."

"Oh, confound her dress," he muttered to himself.

"Isn't it provoking?" continued Miss Pringle, too much absorbed in her woe to think of joking. "And I had made up my mind to wear it at the Pomfrets; and now the black is spoilt, for what I wanted it."

"It will look very nice where it is—on the green," observed Olivia.

"Not at all. I look a perfect *fright* in green, without white to relieve it. I'll make her unpick every stitch. Servants are the plague of one's

life, that's the truth, Olivia. They're always stupid —always making mistakes. Do come up to my room, my dear, and give me your advice."

"I will come presently, when I have done reading the paper, Aunt Clo."

Then, as Mr. Marston heard the door close behind his irritated sister-in-law, he murmured:

"Foolish woman! I say, Olivia, when you go to balls and dinners, don't let them turn your head, girl, and stuff it full of finery and nonsense. Else, may be, you had better have stayed at home."

The Wednesday came: and witnessed that event which, by the force of a strong will, Miss Pringle had brought about. Olivia Marston was present, for the first time in her life, at an English dinner-party. And, contrary to her own expectations, she was amused. Her right-hand neighbour, Mr. Lionel Pomfret (who had taken her in, by Mrs. Pomfret's dexterous arrangement), did not, indeed, address a single syllable to her during dinner; and as Olivia was not accustomed to try and *make* conversation to young men, she resigned herself, without any compunction, to the pleasant neighbour who sat on her other side. The heir of the house of Pomfret was small, and sickly-looking, with neat, mean features, an unwholesome colour, and a glass in his eye. His very thin hair was gummed tight to his head, and his dimunitive

moustaches gummed straight on end, away from his face. He wore a very elaborate shirt, with large pearl studs; and in the society of ladies, at least—as may have been inferred from his mother's and sisters' conversation—he had not a word to say. It was reported by his friends that there were certain exceptions to this rule; but if so, the exceptions did not fall in that circle of society which Mrs. Pomfret cultivated; and this was perhaps quite as well. Olivia's left-hand neighbour was Julian Westbrook. Mrs. Pomfret viewed the arrangement by which her nephew got next Miss Marston with vexation, and now that she saw Olivia's attention monopolised, it went far to spoil the pleasure of the evening for the good lady. She began to regret that she had asked Julian to come. But then he was such an addition on these occasions that it was felt to be dull when he did not come; and his aunt could never withstand the pleasure of securing her handsome, fashionable nephew, who had more invitations than he could possibly accept, and who indulged his aunt's weakness, by retailing the gossip of circles beyond her reach. He was far too knowing to try and entertain Olivia with such idle talk. He talked, as well informed men of the world do, upon a variety of topics, with equal facility. He had considerable taste for painting and music (of

the modern schools—he honestly confessed that he hated all that was "classical," in either art); he had travelled a good deal; he had at least dabbled in all sorts of books; and finally, he possessed that aptness in conveying to others a vivid impression of what he had heard, seen, and read, which is essential to pleasantness. If the greater part of those ladies, however, who had sat beside Julian at dinners that season had listened to his conversation with Olivia, they would have been surprised. He was a many-sided man.

The annoyance Mrs. Pomfret naturally felt at seeing her son so completely eclipsed where she wished him to shine was counterbalanced, in some measure, by watching how very nicely Kate and Rupert Marston were getting on upon the opposite side. Before the second course was off the table the fond mother had arranged it all in her own mind, and was calculating what it was likely that Mr. Marston would allow his son. Sir James Yellowly, the East India Director, who sat beside her, found that his remarks fell upon inattentive ears; but being a good-natured man, and knowing that Lady Yellowly herself was always sadly preoccupied during the solemn banquets which they periodically gave in Harley-street, he bore no resentment; but devoted himself chiefly to Miss Pringle, who, indeed, as we know, required no

encouragement to talk with enough volubility for two.

There was another point upon which Mrs. Pomfret's mind was not quite at rest during dinner. Indeed when she turned her eyes in the direction of a rigid elderly young lady who sat at the further end of the table, on Mr. Pomfret's left hand, the thoughts of the hostess became harrowed by the cruel suspicion that she had committed a breach of etiquette. On Mr. Pomfret's right sat a plain middle-aged lady, whose husband, Captain Bagshott, was a distinguished sailor. He it was who had handed the rigid elderly young lady to dinner; and apparently he did not find his position beside her quite agreeable. Mrs. Pomfret's arrangements had been all thrown out owing to Lady Yellowly's suddenly having the influenza. At the last moment little Mary—only sixteen—was dressed and sent down to fill the vacant seat at table.

"My dear Miss Pringle," said Mrs. Pomfret, immediately the ladies had retired, while she drew her guest at the same time to a distant corner of the room, "*do* tell me whether I was wrong in sending Mrs. Bagshott out first, before Miss Turkaine? Ought Miss Turkaine to have precedence, as a baronet's daughter? Captain Bagshott, you know, is C.B., and I always imagined that the wives of Companions of the Bath, you know, went

out before baronet's daughters, but I *may* be mistaken—and I should be so distressed to have done what looks so ignorant and stupid. Miss Turkaine stands very much upon her precedence, and I observed that she didn't look at all pleased during dinner."

Miss Pringle racked her brain to recal some analogous case, and how the delicate question had then been decided. She remembered upon one occasion, at Cheltenham, seeing Mrs. Carbuncle taken out before Miss Catherine Weal, who, as everybody knew, was a baronet's daughter; but then Mrs. Carbuncle was niece, by marriage, to the late Earl of Mountgarnet,—which might make a difference. Upon the whole, the case appeared involved in such doubt, and there was so much to be said on both sides, that it was a great relief to Mrs. Pomfret's mind when, upon reference to a peerage, at Miss Pringle's suggestion, the table of precedency gave it triumphantly in her favour.

When the men came up-stairs, Miss Marston was asked to sing or play, and upon her declining, on the score that her musical capacity was small, and only fit for home consumption, Kate sat down to accompany her cousin Julian, whose playing on the French horn was renowned, it appeared. With that happy, careless manner of his, he rose from Miss Marston's side on the sofa, and induced his

long legs to carry him in the direction of the piano, where Kate had been sitting ready for some minutes. Then, out of a rosewood casket, he drew a beautifully finished silver horn. Now, about this instrument there are differences of taste; some persons are dead to the charm of trumpets: but few women, at least, are dead to the charm of a good-looking man exhaling his very soul, apparently, in long-drawn cadences, with grace and gentleman-like propriety. "Mr. Westbrook's playing is so soft!" —"So much feeling!" Those were the phrases one heard passed round the room, from all the pretty lips present. It was hard if so handsome a man, playing with such expression, should not be allowed a few false notes. And, to say the truth, he did not deny himself this luxury, occasionally.

While Julian is playing "Ange si pur" with impassioned pathos, and eyebrows that rise and fall in sympathy with the emotions of each bar, Rupert has sat down by the little quiet school-girl, who is wondering if any one will ever speak to her in her far-off corner of the room. He has found her out, however. Perhaps he wants to talk to her of her sister, who is engaged at the piano? Mrs. Pomfret makes up her mind that this must be the case. She fails to elicit much corroboration of this view, however, when she questions little Mary that night, in her room. The girl thinks it was so kind of Mr.

Marston to come and sit by her when she was all alone; and he is so nice, and so handsome, and he talked *so* pleasantly! But it does not appear that sister Kate's name was mentioned between the two.

The little school-girl will think of that evening for a long time. The young man will go away, and forget all about it, the moral of which is that little school-girls had better not be brought down to fill up empty places at dinner.

Lionel, the whole of this evening, was a despair to Mrs. Pomfret. Now was the opportunity, when Olivia was sitting on the sofa, with a place unoccupied beside her, and Julian was busy with his French horn, for Lionel to redeem his character. Finding that no telegraphic signals produced any effect upon her son, his mother took the extreme measure of crossing the room to implore him to "go and be civil" to Miss Marston.

"I can't, ma. She ain't one of my sort. She regularly sews me up."

"'Sews you up!' Nonsense, Lionel. Don't talk in that absurd way—and do have a little more self-confidence, my dear boy. She's a most charming girl, and I'm sure not the least shy. Just look how Julian and she have been talking. Do go and say *something*."

"I haven't got Julian's cheek, ma. He's so

deuced cheeky, he is. And then he has always lots of chaff ready. I haven't any. I like a jolly woman, that'll help a fellow on a bit—not such a swell as that gal is. It's no use, ma—I can't go and talk—I don't know what to say."

With a heavy sigh the maternal Macchiavelli heaved herself away towards Olivia's sofa. She must trust to time and accident, she saw. Yet a judicious word might not be out of place.

"My dear boy," she whispered, sinking into the cushions at Olivia's side, "is so very diffident—does himself so little justice. No one knows the stores of his mind—the refinement of his nature—for he never shows himself as he really is, Miss Marston. And then he is so afraid of not pleasing, of being thought forward and so on, that when he admires any one very much, he is always more silent than ever—remains at a distance, and shows to the worst advantage. It is such a pity, isn't it?"

"Ah! a great pity."

Olivia was listening to "Ange si pur," and thinking of the last time she heard it, at Lisbon, in the "Favorite." She scarcely heard a word of the sibilation Mrs. Pomfret was pouring into her ear.

"Some people have the capacity of making the most of their gifts—like Julian," continued his aunt; "and those people of course *get on* in a way

that poor Lionel, I fear, never will. It is wonderful how Julian has got on! But then *he* has no diffidence to stand in his way—such an advantage. Plays charmingly, doesn't he?—so soft. Some women, however, do not *like* quite so much *à plomb*—they prefer a little *more* diffidence in a man—and indeed there is no doubt that the most valuable qualities are not those which show themselves on the surface, however attractive it may make people in society."

But now "Ange si pur" had come to an end; the last spasm of the eyebrows had subsided; the silver horn dropped amidst a murmur of applause, and Mrs. Pomfret called out,

"That is quite beautiful, my dear Julian, but you mustn't leave off. They've just begun another rubber of whist. Do pray give us something else. What is that beautiful thing we heard the other night at the concert—sung by that pretty woman—don't you remember?"

"'Robert, toi qui j'aime,' mamma," said Kate. "Have you got it arranged, Julian?"

"No," he answered, shortly; "I haven't."

"I wish you'd get it, Julian," said his aunt, "I never heard anything more thrilling than it was, as that Mrs. ——, what was her name? sang it, with such intense passion. You *must* remember, Julian, for you were quite excited while she was

singing. A very pretty woman, and such a voice. I have it ringing in my ears, now."

"It requires a woman's voice to give that song effect," said the horn-player, indifferently. "Here, Kate, let us try the 'Trovatore.' "

"By all means. Elliston was the woman's name, mamma. She is a beginner, I suppose, for I have never seen her name anywhere else. You promised, next time we saw it down for a concert, that you would go."

"Come, Kate, let us begin," said her cousin, impatiently.

As the party from the Cedars were driving home that evening, Miss Pringle was loud in praise of the delightful evening they had passed.

"Nothing could be more agreeable than Sir James Yellowly during dinner—so chatty. And our rubber really quite reminded me of Harrowgate—so very pleasant. Mr. Pomfret is a perfect gentleman, and a very steady nice player, and he complimented me upon my play. We won two rubbers, Olivia. As to that Captain Bagshott, he may be a very gallant officer, but I'm very glad he wasn't my partner, that's all. He revoked twice. I hope you amused yourself, my dear. I pitied you going in with that horrid, *vulgar* eldest son—the only one of the family that is objectionable, eh?" (The fact is, she had overheard Lionel ask

his mother, "Who is that little old party in a yellow wig?" Miss Pringle never could forget this. But for this, she would have warmly encouraged Mrs. Pomfret's maternal scheme, no doubt; as it was, she never could endure his name henceforward.) "However," she continued, "you were not *dependent* on him, I was glad to see. The big man seemed to make himself pleasant, didn't he? But do you like all that trumpeting in a room? I'm not very musical, you know, so I'm no judge. I remember a man once playing a horn or something under my window, and though of course it was gratifying, I thought it a horrid bore; and really in a room, I think it reminds one of being in a stage-coach."

"Mr. Westbrook plays with a great deal of expression," said Olivia; "I liked it so much. It's a pity that he isn't always quite in tune, perhaps."

"*Always?*" said Rupert, laughing. "My dear Olivia, 'the wind bloweth where it listeth' in that man's horn. I don't fancy his look at all, and I think his playing quite as great an infliction as Aunt Clo does."

"I'm not so fastidious as you are about music, fortunately. I believe I can get pleasure out of what isn't first-rate."

"Then the fellow's such a prig. I hate his looks."

"You know nothing *but* his looks, do you? You didn't talk to him. If you had, you'd have found him very pleasant, and not at all conceited."

"That's what women always think when a man takes the trouble of being agreeable to them. I never saw a fellow give himself greater airs. Did you notice his manner to his aunt and cousins? Such a cool hand."

"I don't know about that. I didn't shake hands with him," laughed his sister. "I only know that if you'd had Mr. Lionel Pomfret sitting on one side of you at dinner, you'd have been glad to find any one as agreeable as Mr. Westbrook on the other."

"Young Pomfret doesn't look as if he'd set the Thames on fire—but his sisters are niceish girls—the youngest is a pretty little thing. I like the family altogether better than I expected."

Aunt Clo was dozing audibly in a corner of the carriage, or she would not have allowed such tame praise to pass unchallenged.

CHAPTER VI.

ANXIETIES.

RUPERT MARSTON'S anxieties had been allayed upon the subject of Lozados, or, it may be supposed, he would hardly have entered so readily into the humours of the Pomfret entertainment. But his father's old friends, De Castro and Montalba, as well as other Portuguese whom he had consulted, laughed to scorn the idea of the great Lisbon house being in a critical condition. They assured him—and had they not been in business all their lives?—that such reports were not unfrequently set afloat, to serve some particular end. They knew there were "bears" in this case, who were trying to depreciate the market of Portuguese stock. Lozados was no mercantile gambler—no successful man of yesterday, whom a chance

might ruin, as a chance had made. His credit was consolidated by half a century of steadfast respectability, by the uprightness of his dealings, the shrewdness of his intellect, and, above all, by his abstinence from all speculation. Rupert was only too glad to believe that the warnings of Mr. Claxton and other English friends had no other foundation than the wise general principle, that an excessive rate of interest paid upon capital indicates a corresponding amount of insecurity. As he could not bring his father to admit this, he wisely put the subject away from his mind as much as possible.

The intimacy between the Pomfrets and Mr. Marston's family ripened in a way that was not foreseen or sought, and could scarcely be accounted for by Olivia and her brother. The strong will of the mother on the one side, who lost no opportunity of cultivating this intimacy, and the readiness of the aunt to embrace such, on the other, were the two motive powers that brought about this result. Upon some pretext or other no three days elapsed without an interchange of notes, a visit, a walk together, a party made up to some exhibition in London, an evening spent at the Park, or one of the few favoured houses in the neighbourhood which Mrs. Pomfret patronised. It followed that Olivia saw very much more than Rupert of their new friends. Except in the case

of their evening meetings, which with all Mrs. Pomfret's best endeavours could only be occasional, the young man of business was of course absent. The flame which the anxious mother flattered herself was lit that first evening did not burn as vigorously as could be wished; yet, Heaven knows, it was not for want of fanning. Rupert accepted their invitations, and went with them to the opera. He talked and laughed with Kate, as in duty bound; indeed, he thought her a very nice girl; but he went no further. He was not the least bit in love, though poor Mrs. Pomfret still tried hard to persuade herself that this was the case. Unfortunately there was another heart concerned in the matter, which anxious mammas in like circumstances are apt to forget. Kate was not yet a *blasée* young lady; she had been out a couple of years, but had seen few men in any degree of intimacy. This young and good-looking man, she was now, for three or four months, seeing very often. It was small wonder that though Rupert's attitude remained unchanged, the girl was gradually falling in love, or fancying herself so, which, for the time being, at all events, came to the same thing. Foolish Mrs. Pomfret!

Towards Olivia, therefore, from different motives, the feelings of both mother and daughter were drawn. They neither of them relaxed their efforts

to win her friendship; and to such a measure of that sentiment as springs from gratitude for kindness they attained. She felt, indeed, a lively desire to respond to their warm demonstrations of affection. The circle of her friends had hitherto been so limited, especially among women, that she could not remain untouched by the efforts of mother and daughter to break through the cold ground of acquaintance, and draw closer to her. Most people with any power of attraction about them have known what it was to meet with some enthusiastic admirer, who by the sheer strength with which he fastens and holds on to their friendship, leaves them without the power to shake him away. This was pretty much the case with Olivia and her new friends. Kate was very commonplace, but she was a blind worshipper of Olivia's, partly, no doubt, in consequence of Rupert. Mrs. Pomfret's was even a more genuine admiration. Quite apart from the insane idea which possessed her of forcing a wife upon her son, and the many advantages which Miss Marston united for the part of daughter-in-law, the elder lady had that perception of Olivia's character, which a lower nature, coming in contact with a higher one, occa-

nally obtains. There was no one point of re-

blance between them; but this, though it

ht render sympathy difficult on Olivia's part,

was certainly an additional attraction in Mrs. Pomfret's eyes. She was so far removed from a dull woman that she knew her own shortcomings, and could appreciate qualities to which she was unaccustomed. Olivia's simplicity and unworldliness, her unselfishness, and the absence in her of all pretension, all effort to attract admiration, were great charms in Mrs. Pomfret's eyes.

"That girl will be the making of Lionel," said the worthy mother one night to her husband. "She is a true lady, Pomfret; that is what Olivia Marston is, and what Lionel *wants*, to draw him out properly. Mark my words, he will be a different man when they've been married a year."

"But, my dear, it seems to me—eh?—that he doesn't fancy the girl. He doesn't speak half a dozen words to her when she is here, and I don't think ever calls there. You know best, my dear, I dare say; but it does seem to me that there is no chance of this coming to pass, at present, a bit more than there was of his marrying Miss Wilde last year, or Miss——"

"Oh, Pomfret, don't revert to that, please. I'm quite ashamed of myself when I think of my having wanted him to marry that girl. It was all my horrid worldliness; there was nothing but her connection to recommend her. This is a *very* different case. The man who gets Olivia Marston, I

don't care who he is, if he's a duke's *eldest son*, Pomfret, he is a lucky man. And I don't despair. She is getting accustomed to us now, and there's nothing like a girl getting to know a man's family well. She knows what she has got to look to. I confess it will require management, Pomfret—a good deal of management—but *that*, you know, I'm accustomed to. And for my dear boy, I do feel it *is* a prize worth trying for."

"If I were to offer an opinion," said Mr. Pomfret, hesitatingly, and, as usual, with great deference to his better half, "it would be that Lionel has no chance—even if he were to try, which he doesn't—as long as Julian is always here. You shouldn't ask him quite so often, if you want to get Lionel to talk to the girl, my dear. It's no business of mine, of course; I merely offer an opinion. But it seems to me that Miss Marston finds Julian a very agreeable fellow, as, indeed, he is; but it isn't your boy's game, that's all."

"Well, Pomfret, Julian is *your* nephew, remember, and has been brought up like one of ourselves here. He has always come down whenever he likes, and I don't see how I can stop his visits suddenly. Besides, my dear, with all his faults (and I know he is horridly selfish and a *mauvais soojet*), Julian is immensely useful, and I shouldn't like to throw him over quite. But I told Olivia

Marston at the very first, and I have repeated it constantly since, that Julian isn't a marrying man. I told her about that affair two years ago, and how many other scrapes he had been in altogether; in short, I thought it right to *open her eyes* about him. Olivia is a *very* superior girl. I'm not afraid of her falling in love with him. She likes him very well to talk to, and that is all, depend on it."

"Oh, my dear, I dare say you're right," said Mr. Pomfret, as he turned round and fell asleep.

This, then, was the state of things at the end of three months from the day Miss Marston first dined at Caverton Park. How far Mrs. Pomfret was justified in the interpretation we have just heard her give of the young lady's feelings towards Julian Westbrook will be seen presently.

Rupert found himself in the same railway-carriage with Lionel and two of his choice companions, one evening, on his way from town. The young men were discussing Julian, by no means a favourite with any of them, when Rupert entered the carriage.

"Such a chap for women! always in a mess with one or other. He went on like anything last year with a gal at Brighton, and then walked off as cool. D'you remember, too, that little actress he was so sweet on, two years ago? By Jove!

that was near being a pretty kettle of fish. He was awfully spoony."

"But she was married!"

"That was what saved him, man! Why, bless you, you didn't think Julian was over particular about the seventh commandment, did you? Bill says that he was very near having to fight a duel at Baden last year about a Rooshian princess. *I* can't think what the women see about him, for my part, only he's such a lot of brass."

That was pretty much Rupert's unexpressed opinion, too. His bile rose whenever he found himself in this man's company. He could be lenient—knowing his own weakness, how could he be otherwise?—to the follies of passion; but to the systematic vice and heartless trifling, begotten of vanity alone, he was utterly pitiless.

It is a June morning. At the Cedars breakfast is just over, and Olivia comes out upon the terrace looking as fresh in her muslin dress as the rose she stoops to gather. Then she looks out to the river between the black arms of the Cedars, and now to the pea-green fields beyond, where the buttercups shine like specks of gold in the glittering sunlight, and nature stares out as hard and vividly brilliant as the crudest pre-Raphaelite picture.

Suddenly, between those fields and her, the sharp prow of a boat is seen parting the swift-

flowing waters of the river. Then the single figure in this "out-rigger" becomes visible, plying a long, slow, vigorous stroke, that sends the foam-flakes flying from his oar. And then, by a neatly-executed manœuvre, the boat, obeying the hand of its master, runs into a little creek at the foot of the Cedars garden. Olivia has recognised the boat and its occupant. He has more than once paid visits thus, whereby the village and neighbourhood have lost the opportunity of discussing *why* Mr. Westbrook's horse should be seen so often turning in at the gate of the Cedars. Never before, however, has he called so early. Olivia wonders what has brought him at this hour, and remembers, with some annoyance, that Rupert, whose prejudice against Westbrook is still great, has been detained an hour later than usual, and is still in the house. The tall, strong figure of the rower, a loose jacket thrown over his striped jersey, his face and hands tanned already many degrees browner than when we saw him in the spring, comes with its long indolent gait swinging up across the lawn towards the terrace where Olivia stands. She does not call her aunt or retire, as most properly bred young ladies would think it necessary to do. She simply sits down.

"I am an early visitor, Miss Marston; excuse me. I am rowing part of the way up to Windsor,

and stopped to ask you a question on the way. The Guards have a ball there next week. Will you go, if I get you and your aunt an invitation? I am sure I can manage it, and I think you would be amused. Do say 'Yes.'"

Olivia shook her head and smiled.

"Such dissipations are quite out of my line. Do you know, I have never been to a ball."

"So much the better. Make a beginning now, then."

"The quiet old house wouldn't know what to make of it if I were to be away all night. No, you mustn't tempt me."

"But why not? Surely you don't want to lead this monastic life for ever? Your father can't object, I'm sure."

"Bless me, Mr. Westbrook!" exclaimed Aunt Clo, suddenly coming out from the drawing-room, with her knitting in her hand, "who'd have thought of seeing you? Well, this *is* an unexpected pleasure! I heard voices, and thought I'd just see who it was. Dear me! what a heat you're in. Have you asked Mr. Westbrook if he would take anything, Olivia?"

"Nothing," said Julian, quickly, before Olivia could reply; "I only came to offer you and Miss Marston tickets for the Guards' ball at Windsor next week. Several of them are great friends of

mine, and I know I could get tickets; but your niece declines."

"*Declines!*" cried Miss Pringle. "Gracious goodness, Olivia, why on earth should you decline Mr. Westbrook's very civil offer? I'm sure, when I was a girl, I should have jumped at it; and, indeed, though I no longer dance (I have given it up for the last year or two, though people told me there was no *necessity* for it), still, I confess, I should enjoy going to the ball vastly."

"Well, dear aunt, you can go," said Olivia, with a sly smile at the corners of her mouth, as she glanced towards Julian. "There is nothing to prevent you, that I know of, if Mr. Westbrook procures you the invitation. By-the-by," she added, "of course I need not ask if the Pomfrets are going. Kate enjoys a ball so much."

"Well," said Westbrook, colouring slightly, "at present I haven't asked for invitations for them; but if you go, I'll try and manage to get tickets for my aunt and Kate. As to Lionel, of course it is out of the question."

"Mr. Westbrook, you ought to get your aunt and cousin tickets *before* any one else. As to myself——"

"Don't be absurd!" struck in Aunt Clo. "I shall tell your papa, Olivia, and then you will be *made* to accept, as you were about the opera,

which I am sure we enjoyed vastly, Mr. Westbrook, thanks to you. Why, when your papa is in bed and asleep, child, what is there to prevent your being at a ball?"

Olivia hesitated a moment.

"I don't know what Rupert may think about it; I could not accept without consulting him. Will there be an invitation for my brother also, Mr. Westbrook?"

"I am almost afraid not. I will manage it if I can; but men's invitations are more difficult to get, as you can understand."

"At all events," she said, in her quick, decisive way, "I am quite resolved upon one point. I cannot think of accepting this invitation at your hands until the Pomfrets have been invited first. I will speak to Rupert in the meantime."

Westbrook did not relish this ultimatum, and Aunt Clo tried to overrule it, but Olivia was firm. Promising to call the following day, the young man shook hands with both ladies, and trailed lazily back across the lawn towards his boat. The next moment Rupert came out upon the terrace. Aunt Clo began with volubility to explain the object of Westbrook's early visit. But the brother, drawing his sister's hand within his arm, walked slowly away down the terrace-walk, without reply-

ing to Aunt Clo's eager demand for his approval of the ball project.

"I don't like that fellow's coming here so much, Olivia."

"You hear what it was brought him now?—to offer to get us tickets for the Guards' ball at Windsor."

"You did not accept, I hope?" he said, sharply.

"Well, no; I said I would speak to you. My father, I know, will urge my going, if Aunt Clo speaks to *him* about it. Of course I shouldn't go unless you had an invitation, and would go too."

"Then you may be very sure I shall not do that, on any invitation of Westbrook's."

"Why not?" asked Olivia, colouring.

"Why not! Because I hate the fellow. I haven't the least objection to the ball itself. If you can get an invitation by any other means, you shall go; but I have every objection to your owing your invitation to that fellow—to your being seen much with him—to your putting yourself under any sort of obligation to him. I think it would be a disadvantage to you, Olivia, for it to be said that he was paying you attention. He has done so to heaps of other girls, and I don't choose you to be cast in with the lot of those he has flirted and amused himself with, and forgotten—though even *that* I should think a less misfortune, almost, than

your marrying him, if there was the least chance of such a thing."

"There is no such chance," said Olivia, impatiently; "but why are you so prejudiced? It is unworthy of you, Rupert."

"Because, I tell you, I have a bad opinion of him."

"But *why?* You go on repeating those vague rumours—do you absolutely *know* the truth of any of them? I hate stabbing in the dark."

"His reputation is well known. Besides, any one with any knowledge of the world can see what sort of man he is."

"*I* have *no* knowledge of the world. Of course I can see that he has had much to spoil him, but I think there is a great deal of good in him, nevertheless. He seems so susceptible to good influence. I fancy he has never known what it was to be really attached to any one yet."

"And therefore you think there are excuses to be made for him? If you judged quite dispassionately, Olivia, you would not think so. The man will never be really attached to any woman—it isn't in him. He's vain and selfish, and he has made many a woman miserable by his good looks and his plausible smooth tongue. I have made it my business to inquire about him, and I have learnt quite enough to justify the antipathy I felt towards

him from the very first. I know the sort of man so well!" he added vehemently, digging the end of his stick, as he spoke, into the lawn on which they were walking.

"His aunt spares no pains to let one know her nephew's shortcomings, but as she always contrasts them with her son's perfections, I don't pay much attention to her. Mrs. Pomfret is a very good woman, and I am sensible of all her kindness to me — but upon some subjects she is quite demented."

Olivia said this, because she was confident that it was from Mrs. Pomfret that Rupert had heard so much to Westbrook's disadvantage; and because she felt resentful of this particular mode of pushing her son's interest, which the good lady was disposed to employ.

"I don't listen to women's gossip," replied Marston, disdainfully. "A man's character is generally judged pretty fairly by his fellow men. Westbrook has few staunch *friends*—he has plenty of intimate acquaintances. He is looked upon as very good company—light in hand, agreeable, a thorough man of the world. No human being would ever think of sending for him in sickness, or applying to him in any strait whatever; and though I have met with many men who said they 'liked' him, I have never met one who deluded

himself into the belief that if he were to die to-morrow, Westbrook would care one straw."

"I think you are wrong, Rupert,—I think you are quite wrong as to his having no feeling," returned his sister, warmly. "From all I have ever heard him say——"

"Ay—that's it. He *talks* sentiment beautifully, doesn't he? Give me a man's actions to judge him by. This fellow, Olivia, is quite unworthy of you. Take care what you are about. Take care before it is too late—and you make yourself and my father and me miserable."

She checked the words which rose to her lips, and was silent for a moment or two. Then she raised her face to his, and kissed him.

"Your anxiety about me makes you exaggerate everything, dear boy. There is no danger of this coming to pass. I'm not vain enough to fancy, because Mr. Westbrook has paid me a little attention, that I am the one favoured woman who has at last secured the affections of this very volatile gentleman. Your fears are quite premature."

"That may be—I hope it is so—but that doesn't alter the case. You like him—you don't deny it. You won't believe a word against him. Who shall say that while this fellow 'means nothing,' as the phrase goes,—while he thinks it fine fun to be amusing himself with a girl who knows nothing

of the world, you may gradually fall in love—and——"

"I should have thought you knew me better than to have any fear of that sort," said Olivia.

"Well, supposing, for argument's sake, that he really loves you, and asks you to be his wife, are you prepared to refuse him?"

"Certainly I am—at present" (the words were more assured than the manner). "I don't know enough of him. I like him, that's all. You know, too, that, as long as my father lives, I shall never leave him. It is a charge our beloved mother gave me when she died—and Mr. Westbrook is not likely to take a wife under such circumstances. Fancy such a gay man leading what he calls our 'monastic life!'" She smiled. "You see I have no delusions about him, only I think you are unjust—very unjust. I am sure he is *not* heartless, as you say."

"Will you promise to be guided by me, Olivia, in this matter? I am so little at home, and Aunt Clo is such a goose, that it must be left to your own good sense to follow or not to follow my advice. Discourage this fellow's visits here. Have as little to say to him as possible. I tell you fairly that he and I never will be, never can be, friends. I can't prevent your seeing him, if you choose, but I enter my most decided protest

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] Aunt Rupert?
[redacted] you to be so
[redacted] my hand off,
[redacted] as well as a man can
[redacted] but my soul it's as black as
[redacted] we are in the middle of June.
[redacted] Olivia. No
[redacted] weather, of course,

[redacted] Aunt Rupert—unless Aunt

[redacted] that doesn't take out
[redacted] have the carriage out in such
[redacted] smashed to bits. By-the-
[redacted] coming out—what's this
[redacted] a ball, or something, eh?
You mustn't stay away on

my account, remember, or I shall be very angry —not but what balls are poor amusements, I think—a parcel of foolish boys and girls jumping about; but if it amuses you——"

"No, dear father, I have decided not to go." And Olivia glanced up at her brother. "I assure you my decision has nothing to do with you, but under the circumstances I know I should not enjoy the ball."

Mr. Marston did not further press the point, and the subject dropped. A minute after, Rupert kissed his sister, as they reached the steps of the terrace, and hurried through the house on his way to town.

An hour or two later, when the day's *Times* had been read, and the journal written, Olivia came out once more upon the terrace steps, with a blotting-case in her hand, and drawing a chair towards her little table, she sat for some minutes with her elbows on her knees, turning over in her mind how she could best express that which she had to say. A soft summer breeze from the river wafted up to her the sweet breath of honeysuckle, and jasmine, and clove pinks that grew under the wall. From their dove-cote, in the big elm, whose leaves were flickering in the light wind and sunshine, her doves were cooing their low monotonous measure, so full of pleasantness and peace. Olivia

laid her pen down, and let herself drift upon a stream of thought.

What was her real feeling towards Julian Westbrook? How far had her liking for his society carried her? In spite of what she had said to her brother, she was not quite sure herself upon these points. Sometimes she almost thought—she half feared—that she was a little in love. Her imagination was dazzled—her heart *bewildered* by the devotion of the first very attractive man it had fallen into her lot to meet. Her powers of comparison, be it remembered, were reduced to the narrowest compass by the singularly isolated life she had led. She could not gauge him by other men; she only knew that he was infinitely the pleasantest person she had ever seen much of. With all her love for Rupert, Olivia was aware that he was often prejudiced. He loathed "a fine gentleman;" and Westbrook's cool, free and easy manners had predisposed Rupert to believe the evil he had heard of him. This Olivia felt: and demurred in consequence, at accepting, as true, all her brother said to Julian's disadvantage. Yet he had spoken positively; and he knew life, which she did not.

But on one point she had no hesitation. She ained firm in her resolution to discourage tbrook's further advances. Indeed, circum-

stanced as she was, she had scarcely a choice in the matter, it seemed to her. Her love for her brother was, after her devotion to her father, the next strongest passion in her heart. This she never doubted. Whatever her feeling towards Westbrook might ripen into, if fostered, it had not yet mastered those early affections, which had grown with her growth, and had been all in all to her, hitherto. Since Rupert was so dead set against him, Westbrook's intimacy with her should cease. For the present, at all events, she must see as little of him as possible. For Westbrook's sake, this was but right; and it was wise for her own. Who could tell but that, by and by, Rupert might change or modify his opinion of this man's falsity and wickedness? And *then*, why, if so perhaps——

What she at last wrote ran thus:

"Dear Mr. Westbrook,—In order to save time, as well as to prevent your having the trouble of calling here to-morrow, I write to say that I find it is not in my power to accept the invitation you were kind enough to offer to procure for me, so you must think no more about it. Do not think me impertinent, however, if I express a hope that you will exert the same interest to secure your aunt and cousin invitations

that you kindly proposed using for me. They would justly feel hurt otherwise.

"I remain, dear Mr. Westbrook,

"Very truly yours,

"OLIVIA MARSTON."

In spite of this, Julian Westbrook called at the Cedars next day. He was not admitted. The following morning Olivia received these lines:

"DEAR MISS MARSTON,—I am sorry your brother should have prevented your accepting the invitation which it would have given me great pleasure to have procured for you. As your absence will rob the ball of its only attraction to *me*, I shall not go. You will understand, therefore, that it would be impossible for me to ask for invitations for my relations when I shall not be there to present them, in person. Trusting that I may be fortunate enough to find you at home some day this week, believe me to be very sincerely yours,

"JULIAN WESTBROOK."

Had Rupert seen this note, he would not have failed to detect one thing which, not unnaturally, escaped Olivia. The thing to be detected, and which all Julian's astuteness would not have

hidden from Rupert, was this: that, whereas Westbrook would have liked the *éclat* of introducing a handsome distinguished-looking girl to his fine Guardsmen friends, he shrank from being seen with rather a vulgar-looking aunt, and very ordinary first cousin.

But, for all that, Rupert was wrong in his estimate of Julian's character—wrong, at least, in one respect. He was capable of a strong, if selfish, passion: and Olivia Marston had aroused this, in a measure which surprised the *blasé* man of the world himself.

CHAPTER VII.

A PROPOSAL.

THERE had been a heavy thunderstorm, with wind, in the morning; followed by torrents of rain. About two, it cleared off, and blue sky showed; but great pools of water lay in the gravel walks, and the hopping of the birds (who were now singing loudly again) from branch to branch, shook down a shower of large drops, every moment.

The garden was in this condition, when Olivia came out, with her basket on her arm, and her gown tucked up, to see what damage the storm had done to her flowers. She stood tying up a rose-tree, which the wind had broken away from the trellis, round the front-door porch; getting, for her benefit, a rain of little pearls upon her

upturned face, from the large shining leaves: and, while thus engaged, she heard the shrubbery gate opened, and the sound of a horse's hoofs upon the wet gravel behind her. She did not turn round, though she knew at once who it was; but it was too late to retreat. By the time she had finished tying up the rose, Westbrook was close to her.

"I am fortunate to have found you, at last," he said. "I have called twice lately, and almost began to think you never meant to admit me again. However, this wet day, I thought you could hardly get farther than your garden."

"Did you start in the rain?" she said; "I am afraid you must have got wet."

Her manner had something of its old shyness: for she felt uncomfortable: it seemed so inhuman not to ask him in, after his wet ride!

"Yes, I got a little wet, but nothing to signify. I am repaid by finding you." There was a pause; and then he said, "I will take my horse round to the stable, if I may?"

She coloured: and, for a moment, knew not what to reply. "If you will go in, you will find my aunt. Perhaps you will have a glass of wine?"

She pulled out a piece of wire from her basket, and turned to busy herself again with her rose-

tree. He looked keenly at her: then he replied, in his careless off-hand way,

"No, if you are going to remain out here, I'll——"

"I am going into the village as soon as I have done tying up this rose," she said quickly, her face still turned away.

There was no mistaking this. He was too gentlemanlike to insist further—and not to show that he understood her hint. He had recourse to what is so invaluable in such emergencies—he sighed deeply.

She had finished fastening up the tree now; and, more by way of something to do, in this awkward silence, than for any other reason, she cut off three or four roses, and put them into her basket. She felt so sorry for him:—it was very distressing—but what could she say? It was more honest to let him, at once, know the footing on which he must be, henceforward.

Westbrook looked very much annoyed; but he was equal to the emergency. With nineteen-twentieths of his women-acquaintances he would have masked his annoyance, and made a careless remark or two upon some indifferent topic. But this was not the game to be played with Olivia. He remained silent, until she turned towards him. He was leaning against the saddle, with the bridle

thrown over his arm, as she looked up. It was a graceful attitude, and I dare say Westbrook knew the advantages of his position, as he bent his handsome eyes reproachfully on Olivia.

"Will you give me one of those roses, to take back with me to London?" he asked, in a low voice.

It seemed impossible to refuse; it was attaching too much importance to a trifle: yet the moment after she had given the flower, she half regretted that she had done so. For he murmured,

"I shall always keep this rose."

"Flowers gathered when they are wet, never last," she replied. "Shall I ring for the groom to take your horse, Mr. Westbrook?"

"Thank you, I won't disturb Miss Pringle," he said, with a slightly sarcastic inflection. "I shall ride back to town straight, as you—are going out, Miss Marston. Shall you be at the Pomfrets on Tuesday evening?"

"I—I don't know. I hardly think so. It is a dance, is it not? That is quite out of our line."

"But now that you have once broken through your habits of seclusion——"

"Oh! we shall return to them, I think."

"Do you, then, really dislike society?"

"No; but as my brother"—she stopped short,

and felt herself colouring; but, resolved, in some modified way or other, to get out what she wanted to say, she went on—"as my brother doesn't care about it, I think we shall go to the Pomfrets much less often, in future, than we have lately done."

"Oh! of course, I was aware that Marston had a good deal to do in the *change of your views*," he said quietly.

"Good-bye, Mr. Westbrook; I must be going."

She held out her hand, and turned quickly down a narrow footpath, to the right, where he could not follow.

How handsome he was! She felt very sorry for him. She could not believe all that Rupert said. She was sure he was to be pitied: there was something in his voice and manner, when he was softened, as he was just now, that was very interesting. It had only been by a hard struggle that she had managed, throughout that short interview, to maintain the cold demeanour she had assumed.

After all, Rupert decided, that evening, when his sister asked him, that she had better go to the Pomfrets on Tuesday. "It will give rise to questions—conjectures—Heaven knows what, if you refuse, and suddenly leave off going to them, after your intimacy of late."

"And what am I to do, if Mr. Westbrook asks me to dance?"

"You can dance with him once—it would be remarked if you didn't: but find some excuse to avoid dancing more with him."

The Tuesday came—a lovely June evening. It was but a small party; a few of the smarter neighbours, and a sprinkling of men from London; some five-and-thirty in all, and most of them dancers. There was a man at the piano, and tea in the library: and at twelve o'clock, the dining-room was opened, and a handsome supper was "discovered"—as they say in play-books. Just before this Julian had been waltzing with Olivia. He said very little—and he waltzed to perfection: under the circumstances, it was all that could be desired.

When the waltz was over, they found that every one who had not been dancing was gone into supper. They went as far as the door of the dining-room, but there was no room for them at the table. Olivia saw Aunt Clo, with a mass of golden, quivering jelly before her, and Sir James Yellowly beside her, filling her champagne-glass; and a little lower down, Rupert, looking very benevolent, with little Mary at his side, whom he had made happy by taking into supper.

"Since there is no room for us here, let us go

into the conservatory," said Westbrook. "It will be cooler than these rooms."

Two or three other couples were wandering on before them in the same direction. Olivia thought it best to follow these, instead of sitting alone with Westbrook in the drawing-room. The cool green twilight—for the only illumination was a Chinese lantern or two, shining like glow-worms among the orange-trees—and the trickling of a fountain, among shells and ferns, were refreshing after the heat and glare of the gas-lighted rooms.

Lionel Pomfret, arm-in-arm with a friend, and in a close, whispered conversation, passed them.

"Can you keep a secret?" asked Westbrook of Olivia, smiling, when the two young men were gone by.

"I have had so few to keep in my life that I can't tell. But as they say no woman *can*, I am glad I have never been tried. I'm sure I am no wiser or stronger than the rest of my sex."

"Shall I tell you something about my fascinating cousin there, on condition that you'll promise not to betray me?"

"Thank you, I'm not the least curious about him."

"But it concerns *you*—indirectly, at least."

"Concerns *me?*" and Olivia opened her eyes wide.

"Yes. Of course you know my aunt's wishes? She does not make much mystery about them. Well, what *she*, poor woman, doesn't yet know is that her charming son and heir has engaged himself to Miss Julia Roper."

"I am very sorry indeed to hear it." The next minute she added, quickly, "For your uncle and aunt's sake. I'm so sorry for their annoyance, as I know the young lady is not exactly what they would like for a daughter-in-law."

"She's really quite good enough for him. You mustn't believe all you hear. In a neighbourhood like this there is no end to the gossip."

"She may be good enough for Mr. Lionel Pomfret, but not for his mother and sisters, I think."

"Oh, you are prejudiced by my aunt, who says all sorts of ill-natured things about the girl, because she is not in Fordingham society. I assure you there's nothing against her, except her vulgarity."

"I dare say not. I know nothing about her; but her appearance is not prepossessing. As to gossip, I never believe one half of what I hear."

"Are you sure of that? For instance, you have heard a good deal about *me*, I suspect?"

He bent his face, and tried to see into her eyes. She raised them, and looked at him steadily for a moment; then turned her head away, without a word.

"Miss Marston, what *have* you heard? Tell me frankly. Do not judge me too harshly before you hear my defence."

"How can I judge you at all? What can a girl know about a man's life? She has nothing but her instinct to guide her as to his character, or the truth of anything she hears about him."

"Shall I say that her instinct is always right, or that it is apt to mislead her?" thought Julian. He could not make up his mind, so he cast that aside, and said—

"A man is often unjustly taxed with things which it was impossible he could avoid—which the force of circumstances have drawn him into. He is thrown, let us say, into close intimacy with a girl, about whom, at first, he conceives a very erroneous impression. On knowing more of her, he sees that she is the last person to make him happy—that they are quite unsuited to each other. The world instantly raises an outcry against him: calls him a flirt—a male jilt—all sorts of ugly names; when, really, he has been guilty of nothing worse than a want of due caution—for how *can* a man know anything of a girl until he talks to her?"

"You know how to put things very cleverly, Mr. Westbrook," replied Olivia, with a half-smile, half-frown. "You ought to be a lawyer; I can't

argue with you; still, I know that though there may be some truth in what you say, it is not the whole truth. But, indeed, I had rather not discuss the subject. I'm sure I don't want to judge any one. The only impartial judge of any action in this life, I think, is one's own conscience—one's own standard of right and wrong."

"Exactly, and your standard is perhaps not precisely that of a man of the world."

How distinctly she remembered those words long afterwards, together with the whole scene: the dim green light; the trickling of the water through shells, and the soft plash into its basin; the perfumed breath of orange-flowers; and the handsome face bent over her!

"Women, you see, substitute Conscience for Honour," he said, again.

"And not a bad substitute, either," she replied.

"Perhaps so—for them. But depend on it, that in many cases where there is a loud outcry against evil-doers, if you could know all the circumstances——"

"Ah, you always return to *circumstances*."

"Because women, being exposed to so many fewer temptations than we are, are apt to judge us uncharitably."

"Where is the boasted superiority of men, if they are not stronger to resist temptation? Why

should there be a separate code for men and for women? I am no champion of my sex. I believe that men were meant to be our superiors in all ways. If they are good men, I am sure they are so. But when you speak of women being uncharitable, I want to know why we are to be lenient to the shortcomings of those who ought to be stronger, instead of weaker, than ourselves?"

She spoke impetuously. He was not quite prepared to answer her.

"Upon my word, that is one of those sort of questions that—that is rather difficult to discuss with you," he began.

She took up his words at once.

"We won't discuss it, please. I do want to say one thing, and then we will dismiss the subject. It is this. My only heroes are those who, having a high standard of right, strive to act up to it: not those, however gifted, who yield themselves slaves to every passing inclination of the moment. These men may have *excuses* made for their conduct, but the heroes before whom I am inclined to bow will never require such."

It was strange language from a girl; and the way in which she uttered it made a deep impression on Westbrook. He could not choose, but take the application of those words as meant for himself. She was in another frame of mind from that which

prompted her to palliate Westbrook's reported conduct when speaking to her brother; or rather the difference was, that she was speaking to the man himself—a man whom she liked, and whom she was conscious, if all was true, she could not respect—and not of him to another. She had spoken words which should show him there was a gulf fixed between them. Those words were the simple truth. However much she might like, and try to defend, a man whose character was assailed, she would never permit that liking to grow into a stronger feeling—indeed she felt that she could never give her whole heart to him unless he would stand up boldly, and disprove by his life the calumny of his assailants. If this man had real stuff in him, out of which better things than fell into a career of selfish indulgence might come, the words she had uttered might possibly rouse him.

And he understood her. That hour might be the turning point in his life. The *blasé* man of the world had never felt for any woman as he felt for this girl. He was accustomed to facile conquest, and the quiet fearlessness with which she defied him, while it irritated, had a charm for him, such as the flattering smiles of other women had never possessed. He was in danger, for the first time in his life, of forgetting *himself* in the object of his pursuit. A dim image of a possibly better life

arose before him, and he felt that if he could, by any means, throw a plank across the gulf to which Olivia had pointed, he would burn his ships behind him, he would sacrifice everything which he had hitherto most prized; his independence, his popularity, his luxurious habits—everything.

A minute—but one minute, more, and he would have spoken. No matter what now: for that golden moment was lost, never to return again. Mrs. Pomfret, in a fluster of lace, came hurrying through the library door, and espying the fugitives, of whom she was in chase, exclaimed,

"Oh! here you are!—Julian, they're wanting you to dance. There's Miss Mills just waiting for you to make up a set.—No, you mustn't carry off Miss Marston, Julian, no! I've something particular to say to her. There, now, get up, and go and dance, and I'll take your seat. Miss Marston, you won't mind giving up the dance, will you?"

Julian Westbrook was a man with a strong will of his own, but he knew, by experience, that there were certain cases in which any one who ventured to combat with Aunt Pomfret was sure to be worsted. He saw that she was resolved to oust him from his position; and he yielded it, with a bad grace enough. It is unnecessary to say that he had not the remotest intention of condescending to dance with Miss Mills. He went into the door-

way, and stared superciliously on at the quadrille, resolved to return to Olivia when it was over.

"My dear Miss Marston—my dear Olivia, if you will let me call you so, I have something very particular, very particular *indeed*, to say to you; and you must excuse me, my dear, if I'm rather abrupt, for it is a delicate matter to deal with, and one requiring a good deal more *art* than I possess, to clothe it in all its poetry and eloquence. But I am a plain-spoken woman, as you know, my dear, and not accustomed to varnish what I have to say. It's about Lionel, poor dear boy! You must have observed, you cannot *fail* to have observed, how very dispirited he has been of late—how much he has avoided you, and how very strange and odd his manner has been?"

"Yes," replied Olivia, scarcely repressing a smile, "I have remarked that."

"Well, my dear Olivia, it's very flattering to you. He regards you as so infinitely above him in every way, that it is perfectly hopeless his even *thinking* of you. 'It were all one that he should love some bright particular star'—that sort of thing. I tried to argue him out of this state some time since, but in vain. Since then, his father and I have reason to fear that he has endeavoured to distract his thoughts by paying attention to a girl every way his inferior, and whom we never,

never could receive as a daughter-in-law. You may imagine how *very* distressing this is to us, to see our boy's prospects in danger of being blighted, and his affections turned into an unworthy channel, my dear Olivia!"

Mrs. Pomfret paused, and Olivia saw she was expected to say something. She felt extremely uncomfortable; and yet the comicality of the idea seized her so strongly, that she could hardly forbear from laughing out. She commanded herself sufficiently at last, to reply with becoming gravity.

"What you say naturally surprises me a good deal, Mrs. Pomfret, as I have never seen the smallest indication on your son's part that he liked me. I am inclined to think, therefore, that you must be mistaken, and I trust that you may find reason to be reconciled to the choice he has made, in the course of time."

"Never!" exclaimed Mrs. Pomfret, vehemently. "Never, my dear! and it rests entirely with you to save us from this most terrible calamity. He hasn't the courage, he never *would* have the courage, to speak to you openly; but if you would only let him know, through me, that he needn't despair—if you would only tell him, through me, that if he gives up this horrid girl, you—you will think favourably of him, it would, it *must*, I know, prevent his going on with this abominable busi-

ness. His father has always told him that he would do *anything* for him if he married,—as we wished, of course,—but he threatens naturally to cut him off if he disgraces us by marrying *beneath* him. And really if you could only tell how much there is in him, which only requires bringing out! A girl like yourself would be the *saving* of him. He has such a good heart, my dear Olivia, and you know we are all so fond of you, that I'm sure you couldn't *fail* to be happy"—and Mrs. Pomfret, in effusion, flung her arms round Olivia's neck.

She saw how it was, and she was sincerely sorry for the poor mother, though the absurdity of her manœuvres invested the thing with ridicule. Olivia had, of course, long seen the condition of Mrs. Pomfret's mind upon this subject—for it was, indeed, most transparent. What she now learnt was, that the heir of the Pomfrets, not content with remaining shy and ill at ease where his mother especially wished him to be talkative, had become dangerously talkative in some quarter where his mother would fain that he had remained silent. And now Olivia had to reply to what was, in fact, a proposal by proxy!

"My dear Mrs. Pomfret, I had better tell you frankly that I could not marry your son, even if he liked and wished to marry *me*, which I feel very certain he does not. Your flattering par-

tiality for me has misled you. It is possible you might persuade your son into marrying me, but do you think that a marriage without love on either side, without a taste or a sentiment in common, can be happy? Be assured that it would only make us both miserable. Please say no more about it, dear Mrs. Pomfret. I feel your kindness in wishing to have me for a daughter-in-law, but it's quite impossible that this should be. Don't let us renew the subject."

"There is one thing I *must* say to you, Olivia," —and Mrs. Pomfret wiped the corners of her eyes with her worked handkerchief,—"there is one thing I must say very solemnly and seriously to you. If the cause of your refusing my son is the attention that you are receiving from Julian, you are doing a very *foolish* thing. Lionel mayn't be a brilliant, fascinating man of society, like his cousin, but I'm sure he never *jilted* a girl—never trifled with a girl's feelings in his *life*. He is only too soft, and too *shy* with women, and you must remember that the shiest men make the best husbands. I don't mind telling *you* that he will have some day a clear eighteen thousand a year, and *that* isn't to be picked up every day. As to Julian, I feel, of course, a certain hesitation in speaking about my husband's sister's son, who has always been so much with us, and who, indeed, is always

welcome here, for he is a most agreeable creature to have in the house, but——"

"You need say no more, dear Mrs. Pomfret, than you have already done on this subject," interrupted Olivia, quickly, and with an unconscious tinge of sarcasm. "You are quite mistaken in imagining that your nephew has influenced in any way my refusal of the honour you have done me; consequently it can't concern me to hear what his past conduct has been, and I had rather not do so. Mr. Westbrook and I are never likely to be anything more than we now are to each other. I assure you there is no danger of my swelling the number of his victims—you need not be afraid for me."

She smiled as she spoke, and laid her hand gently upon Mrs. Pomfret's arm, with one of those feminine movements which convey a world of meaning in a very slight action. Westbrook came up at the same moment. The quadrille was over —would Miss Marston dance the next waltz with him? But Olivia was engaged; her partner even now approached to claim her hand. So Julian's opportunity was lost for that evening: and Mrs. Pomfret's edifice of maternal diplomacy crumbled into dust.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CRISIS.

CIRCUMSTANCES ordained that Westbrook and Olivia should not meet again, after that evening, for a very long time to come. Great changes were to take place in the interval: yet so little did Julian foresee anything of the kind that, as he went to bed, he laid out plans for prosecuting the suit which he had only seriously commenced that night. He was not a man easily to be discouraged; he had not a doubt in his own capacity to overcome all Olivia's scruples and win her affection—*if he continued in the same mind.* But he was aware this winning would require time, and more perseverance than he had yet brought to bear on any similar task. Fate, however, it appeared, was against him.

Olivia was alarmed, at an early hour the following morning, by hearing that her father was very ill. She flew to his room, and found him speechless, his face drawn upon one side, his whole appearance in the space of a few hours having undergone a shocking change. He had parted from her the night before, an erect, hale, noble-looking old man; she found him helpless, broken-down, disfigured, his mind and his speech alike affected by the paralysis which had struck him. The best advice from London was telegraphed for, and for days, nay weeks, Mr. Marston's condition was held to be most critical. The doctors did not conceal from Olivia and her brother that a second such attack must in all probability prove fatal. At length, however, after a long interval of anxiety, during which the daughter watched by her father with unremitting care, there was an evident change for the better in the old man's state; the muscles of the face seemed gradually to relax, the tongue was loosed, and the left arm, which had hung helpless, he could now, in a measure, use. The powers of the mind and memory still remained affected; it was painful to see the efforts he made, with his recovered speech, to recal and to discuss past events: and the doctors held out no hope that in this respect he could be again as he had been, before this shock to his system. But even

this much gained was a great deal—a great deal for which that loving daughter thanked God on her bended knees, after watching hour by hour, through the long warm days, and half the short warm nights of June, every varying shade upon the old man's face.

During these weeks she saw no one. Mrs. Pomfret called or sent daily; and it was a very congenial occupation for Aunt Clo (who was of no sort of use, otherwise, just now), to receive visits, to answer notes of inquiry, and to run about among the neighbours, disseminating her little crumbs of news. Julian Westbrook called several times: but as he found that Olivia was invisible, and as he had no particular fancy for a *tête-à-tête* with Miss Pringle, he contented himself with leaving his card.

Who shall say? perhaps it was fortunate that just at this time Olivia Marston's mind was too painfully occupied to give more than a passing thought to him, and that, whether at Caverton Park or at the Cedars, she and Julian were prevented from meeting. She was not in love; but it was not very far from the edge of the precipice which overhangs that fatal gulf that she had resolutely taken her stand, and, with averted eyes, had said, "no further." Julian was a clever fellow in his generation. If he could only have

persuaded her that he was now altogether a changed man—a man whose principle nothing would shake, whose constancy no trial would affect—if he could only have led her, in short, by imperceptible degrees, to the very edge of that precipice, I will not undertake to say that the girl might not have turned giddy. But Fate, while frustrating Westbrook's plans, befriended Olivia. In more ways than one, it will be seen that Mr. Marston's illness proved in the end to be a blessing, rather than the calamity his children naturally considered it.

The Pomfrets' party had taken place in the first week in June. It was the beginning of the second week in July when Mrs. Pomfret called one morning early at the Cedars, and asked to see Miss Marston. Her father's condition had been mending now for the past week, and Olivia had already seen Mrs. Pomfret and her daughter more than once. She had been struck with Kate's looking ill, and with Mrs. Pomfret's appearing dispirited, and was, therefore, in some measure prepared for the announcement which the latter lady was come to make.

"You will be surprised to hear that we are all going abroad, my dear Miss Marston; and probably, I think, for some time. Kate's health has been giving me great anxiety of late, and the

doctors recommend some German waters for her in the first instance, and probably, I think, a warm climate for the winter. Then Lionel, poor boy, sadly requires change of scene. He will accompany us; and I hope may recover his spirits, with new subjects of interest to occupy his mind. Probably my second boy, Harry, will join us in the winter, at Nice or somewhere. He expects to get leave from the West Indies, where he is quartered; so we shall be quite a large party, and I don't think we shall be in a hurry to return. I rather want Mr. Pomfret to sell Caverton."

The objects which the good lady had in view, in the speech above recorded, were various. In the first place, Kate's disappointment, owing to her mother's mistaken conduct, which had led her to fancy that Rupert Marston was in love with her —this was, of course, to be concealed, and a delicate organisation was to be substituted for a temporary derangement of the heart. Kate's common sense made her, at last, see that there was not a shadow of hope that Rupert would ever regard her as other than a pleasant partner—that he would ever hand her down to dinner in preference to any other girl he happened to be near. Slowly and reluctantly, Mrs. Pomfret's eyes had been opened to the same fact.

Another motive in this speech was the endea-

vour (to which she still clung) of making Miss Marston believe that Lionel had suffered much, though in strict silence, because of her; and that the loss of his "spirits" was owing to her unqualified rejection of his hand; the real truth being that Mr. Pomfret and his eldest son had had more than one animated conversation upon the subject of Miss Julia Roper, which had resulted in the elder gentleman's communicating to the lady's father his intention of cutting his son off with a shilling should he persist in marrying contrary to his parents' wishes. This extreme measure, instigated by Mrs. Pomfret, no doubt, was not without its effect. The wily tradesman, finding that he would have a helpless and ignorant son-in-law thrown upon his hands to support, besides the possibility of a large family, thought the honour of being allied to the house of Pomfret would be somewhat dearly bought, and prudently declined it. But in the fear of this desperate Leander swimming over the Hellespont which his parents had provided to obstruct his marriage, it was advisable to remove him from Hero's neighbourhood forthwith. This was really the chief reason for their resolving to go abroad for some months.

It was as well, however, that Olivia should feel all she was losing. We are said never fully to appreciate what we have possessed till this comes

to pass. Therefore Mrs. Pomfret threw in those artistic touches about their lengthened wanderings abroad, and the uncertainty of their returning to Caverton. And then she waited for a reply.

"I think you are so right to go, if Kate's health is likely to be benefited, Mrs. Pomfret. I thought her looking very pale the other day; and you would enjoy a winter abroad. I envy any one going to the South, where my childhood was spent."

"I am sure I wish you could come with us."

"Thank you," said Olivia, with a smile; "my travelling is all over now. I did enough before I was eighteen to last my life. You will find me, in all probability, growing in the same place when you return, without having passed a single night away from the Cedars. I take it for granted that you *will* return to Caverton. I thought you were very fond of it, Mrs. Pomfret? and you have made it so comfortable—so very comfortable. Why should you leave it?"

"Well, there are a good many reasons," replied Mrs. Pomfret, clearing her throat of nothing, and ending with a dry cough; "a good *many* reasons; but I need only mention one—the lamentable want of society. I do not think it is doing our girls justice. Mary will be ready to come out next year, and I should like her to see something of *the*

world. Now, really we have such a wretched set here, that we might as well be living—I don't know where."

"And where do you think of going?"

"London, perhaps—I don't know. Nothing is settled at present. Mr. Pomfret may perhaps take a larger place, more in the country, where we may have *county* society. You will write to me, my dear, won't you, when we are away?"

Olivia shook her head, smiling.

"No, Mrs. Pomfret, you mustn't trust to me. I have never had a correspondent in my life, and I have not the art of writing glib letters about nothing. If there is anything to tell you, I promise to let you hear; but my life is too uneventful, and I am too little accustomed to English composition, to undertake a regular correspondence with any one."

It was said laughingly, but Olivia did not relent, though Kate begged piteously for an occasional letter. She would promise no more than she had done at first—to write if she had anything to tell. Ten days later, the Pomfrets were actually gone. The great drawing-room at Caverton went into brown holland, and a padlock was put upon the lodge-gate.

Thus Westbrook's most obvious and natural means of communication with Olivia were cut off.

The following week he rode down to the Cedars, and found the ladies—out. He tried yet once again, a few days later, before he left town; but with no better success. It was very provoking. He was going down to Goodwood, and then on to the moors, for the 12th of August; and after that, on a round of visits in Scotland; and he would not be in or near London again for three months at least. He consoled himself, however, with the reflection that the tenor of Olivia's life was very even: she would see few people, and she would go nowhere in the interval, to disturb the impression he was pretty confident he had made; and at the end of the three or four months he would return to find her just as he left her—only duller, and therefore more ready to prize his society. He had quite made up his mind that in the course of the ensuing winter he was to relinquish his independence, by inducing Olivia to become his wife. The short time that was left him, therefore, he resolved to enjoy his freedom, as best he might.

It was a dull November day when Julian Westbrook next mounted his hack at the Albany, and rode down to Fordingham. The fog hung about the river, and smothered everything that lay beyond the flat meadows, and the ghostlike skeletons of elms on either side of him, as he passed through the lane towards the Cedars. The last few

leaves of autumn slid noiselessly through the damp, heavy air around. The colour of everything in the landscape seemed to be blotted out. It did not look like the same scene he had left, scarcely four months before. As he drew near the gate, his eyes fell upon a board, upon which was written, "To be let or sold. For particulars, apply to Mr. Rook, house agent, Maddox-street." He drew in his rein sharply, and sat there frowning at the board, as though he were unable to seize the meaning of those words; then opening the gate, he touched his horse with the spur, and rode on to the house at a smart canter.

The shutters were all closed. It was full five minutes before a woman in drab came to the door, and in answer to Westbrook's inquiries, told him that Mr. Marston's family had left the Cedars some two months ago. An agent had bought the place, and it was now again in the market. She did not know where Mr. Marston's family had gone. Had never heard. Perhaps Mr. Rook knew. All the furniture was sold, after the family left, by auction. Couldn't tell him no more: he had best go to Mr. Rook.

But when, on his return to London, the discomfited Julian applied to Mr. Rook, the latter individual professed himself as ignorant of the movements of the family as the woman had done.

All his dealings were with Mr. Rupert Marston, at Mr. Claxton's house of business, in the City. Now, Julian was perfectly conscious of Rupert's dislike to him; and he returned it. He felt an extreme repugnance to applying to young Marston for information about his sister: and, after some deliberation, he came to the conclusion that, if the Pomfrets could not help him, he must leave it to time and chance to obtain this information. He never doubted but that, somehow or other, it would turn up before long.

CHAPTER IX.

CHANGED FORTUNES.

It was the evening of the 12th August—of the day that Westbrook was beginning his campaign among the moors. The day had been one of those few of real summer which we enjoy in England; its close was clear and golden, promising a glorious morrow. The library window stood open, and through it the sweet breath of jasmine and honeysuckle was borne from the clusters that hung from the trellis around. In the centre of the lawn Olivia had lately placed a small white marble basin, round which her doves settled in relays, drinking and pluming themselves, and then fluttering back to their dove-cote in the elm hard by, while others of their family replaced them. Beyond, and in strong contrast to the white marble, the green-

black cedars sent their long shadows at this hour eastward over the close-shaven lawn; while, further off again, the brown barges and pleasure-boats glided by upon the sunset river, in which every reed and dock-leaf upon the opposite bank was reflected, as in a golden mirror. In those rich meadow lands yonder, which looked almost metallically green by this light, cattle were feeding lazily to their hearts' content, while one or two had come down to the water to drink, and were standing in it knee-deep, whisking the flies off with their tails, and raising their black dripping muzzles ever and anon with an air of quiet satisfaction.

It was a picture eminently characteristic of England—of its middle-class respectability and plenty. The quiet suburban villa, with everything for comfort and nothing for ostentation; that marvellous carpet of green velvet, so unlike anything that is known by the name of grass on the Continent; the lush, dank pastures opposite, where the heavy-uddered cattle were feeding in sleek contentment, were suggestive elements in a scene, not beautiful, perhaps, but pleasant in the sense that it conveyed to the mind abundance, security, and peace.

Mr. Marston's chair was wheeled near the window. He sat there dozing; but woke from time to

time to observe that it was very dark, and to elicit the stereotyped rejoinder from his daughter; after which he relapsed into his former state again, quite satisfied. Olivia was alone with her father, as indeed she generally was now. Since his illness she liked less than ever to leave him. Aunt Clo, finding it dull, betook herself constantly to one or other of the neighbours to tea, whence she returned at ten o'clock in a black silk hood and galoches, attended by her maid. Rupert often came home very late now—sometimes not at all. An early dinner had therefore been established, with a tea-supper at nine, when, if Rupert was at home, he dined; but the greater part of those long summer evenings Olivia and her father were alone.

She was doing nothing: she was building some Spanish castle, I believe; for her eyes had a dreamy, abstracted look, and her hands lay listless over the piece of tapestry before her, whose brilliant colours contrasted with the black oak chair and dim figure of the old man.

On a small table stood a basket of nectarines, an old silver claret-jug, and some glasses. The last rays of the sunset, stealing slantwise into the room, lit the rosy-cheeked fruit and silver flagon, and fell upon the snow-white hair and calm sleeping majesty of the old man. And then the shades

of twilight gradually swallowed them up, and everything in the room grew dim and indistinct.

I have dwelt thus long on that home picture, the taste and luxury of its details, and the tranquillity that reigned there, because this was the last evening in Olivia's life she was destined to pass in that house, under the same conditions of peace and security. A great change was at hand. The moment was come when the even routine of her life was to be broken in upon; when her labour of filial love, while increased twofold, must yet make room for busy thought and action in other fields. That golden summer's evening she often looked back upon, as dividing two distinct portions of her life from each other.

It was half-past eight; Mr. Marston still dozed: it was too dark to read or work without lights, and Olivia was loth to ring for them. She sat there, watching the shadows deepening on the river, the purple veil drooping lower and lower over the heavens, the flat green meadows turning to dusky grey, when a large bat flitted past the window, almost close to her face. She instinctively drew back with a shudder, and found Rupert standing beside her. He had come in so noiselessly—contrary to his usual habit—that Olivia had not heard him. He raised his finger to his lips, and pointed

father.

"Come into the next room," he said, in a hoarse whisper; "I have something to say to you."

His sister rose, and followed him without a word. There was that in her brother's manner which told her it was no ordinary communication she was about to hear.

"Olive, you must prepare yourself for a piece of bad news."

She said nothing, but sat down on a chair near at hand; a sudden weakness came over her, which made her distrust her own strength. He took her hand in both of his; he felt that it turned icy-cold, and he waited a moment or two before he spoke again.

"Olive, a great misfortune has befallen our father."

"Go on; only tell me the worst at once."

"He is ruined. What I feared has come to pass. Lozados is bankrupt."

She started up, and threw herself into his arms.

"Oh, Rupert, our poor father!"

It was all she said. She lay there quite motionless for several minutes, and her brother had the tact to remain silent also. He knew her deep strong nature too well to attempt to soften this blow. It was a heavy one, but she would rise up from it; for it was not of a kind to impair energy

such as Rupert knew his sister possessed. Her first words, her only thoughts, were for her father. After an interval she whispered,

"How can we hide this from him, Rupert? It would kill him just now to be told this."

"My darling, sooner or later he must know it. I leave it to you to break it to him when and how you will. You know I wouldn't have grieved you with the burden of this heavy anxiety if it were possible to avert its consequences in any way—if there were the remotest chance of our being able to continue living here, surrounded by comfort and luxury. But there is not. Everything must be sold—servants—horses—every thing given up. My father will have very little besides what the sale of the house and furniture fetches. There is a small sum that belonged to our mother, which is safe in the English funds, and that is all that is left of his large fortune. It is a terrible wreck, Olive—a terrible wreck! If he would only have listened to me instead of——"

"Dear Rupert, don't think of reproaching him now, even in thought; only let us try and shield him from the weight of this dreadful blow, which he will feel far, far more than you or I can. It is ing to us comparatively, who are young and g; but think of him in his old age, blind and less, brooding over the past with fruitless re-

gret—O, Rupert, what would I give to spare him this!"

"God knows, Olive, so would I—and I have thought of little else since early this morning, when the extent of the calamity was made known to me. One thing I can't be sufficiently thankful for—that my father gave up the conduct of all his affairs into my hands when he became so ill. It renders it much easier for me to do all that it is absolutely necessary should be done, at once—and you can take your own time, Olive, in breaking it to him. But he must be prepared for the change."

"When must it come?" she asked, in a low voice. "When must we leave the house?"

"Not for two or three weeks. I could sell it to-morrow, but hope to do so to more advantage by putting it up to auction, and I shall have it advertised. You must give the servants warning, however. I am afraid even Fritz must go. We must break up the establishment as soon as possible, for every day is a serious drain on our income. My salary, you know, is small. We shall not make up altogether more than 300*l.* a year. The change in all our ways, Olive, must be a complete one. We must come into London, I fear; for even omnibuses and rails run away with a great deal out of such an income."

"And Aunt Clo? What will she do? It has

been very trying sometimes, Rupert, her being *with us even here; how much worse will it be in our poverty, in a small lodging?*"

"*Rats desert a falling house.* You will see that *Aunt Clo shows no desire to follow us into obscurity, Olive.* You must be prepared to lose most *of your friends*, I am afraid, when your ways and *theirs are split wide asunder.*"

"If Aunt Clo leaves us I shall be too thankful, Rupert; and as to friends, the Pomfrets are the *only neighbours* whom I can call so. They are *gone*, and with the rest I have no wish to keep up any communication. Oh! if I could only do *something*, Rupert, to get money—something to help to support myself, and not to be a burden to you! But I feel so helpless! I have no accomplishments; I am not even a good worker; and *he*, poor darling, will require my attention now more than ever. I couldn't leave him, or else I might perhaps go——"

"Olive, whatever befalls us, as long as I can work, remember your place is by my father's side, where you will find enough to do, my poor child, in the daily drudgery of life, deprived of all the comforts to which you have been accustomed. Don't think about work: it will come to you in some form. In adversity a woman is often more helpful in other ways than in stitching."

Olivia sat down and buried her face in her hands.

"Poor father—how will he ever bear this? I dread it, Rupert. I dread telling him more—far more than the poverty itself. God help him to bear it!"

"So He will, through you, Olive, and I hope a little through me. Henceforward we must be more closely united than ever, my sister. We are alone against all the world, and we will face it courageously."

The next morning, after a sleepless night, Olivia prepared to tell her aunt of the great change in their fortunes. Miss Pringle was at first incredulous as to the extent of the ruin which had overtaken her brother-in-law; then she became loud in her reproaches at the imprudence which had brought about this result; and then at last she was silent. What her decision would be, whether or no she would elect to remain with her impoverished relations, was yet to be seen. But Olivia's mind was now wholly occupied with a far greater anxiety. That sleepless night had been productive of one definite resolve. As long, and as far as possible, she determined to conceal from her father the condition of his affairs. She hardly dared hope to do so permanently. But if she could gradually accustom his mind to the great

change which must take place in their manner of life, the danger of a sudden shock in his present condition would be averted.

The doves were cooing in the sunshine; the fountain was babbling its tale of pleasantness and peace: never had her home looked so charming to Olivia as it did that morning, when she knew how soon now it must all pass into the hands of strangers. She drew her chair to the old place at her father's side, and she steadied her voice to read the *Times*, as usual, from beginning to end. But the eye and the voice alone read: the mind was other where. When she had done, she put down the paper, and said, with as unconcerned a voice and manner as she could command,

"Father, should you mind very much leaving this place and going into London? Rupert and I have been talking over it. The distance is very inconvenient for him, and for me, too. We think it would be much better if we were to change houses. Perhaps a smaller house would do for us in London, you know."

"Change? Leave this house? What do you mean, Olivia? What's this—eh?"

"You wouldn't mind it for Rupert's sake, father, would you?"

"What are you talking about, child? I'm too old—too old to change. Wait till I'm under

ground. It won't be long. Rupert can go to London if he likes, but you and I'll remain here."

There was something of his old decision—something even of sharpness in the way he spoke. Olivia hesitated a moment before she said,

"To be parted from Rupert would be a great sorrow to us both, father. He is our morning and evening star. We should not be able to get on at all, I think, if he were to go and live away from us in London."

A shade passed over the blind man's face: he sighed.

"Perhaps you are tired of your quiet life here, Olive?"

She felt the blood rush into her face: she was glad for once that her father could not see.

"Not tired of its quiet, father—oh, no! But this is, perhaps, damp—damp and foggy, so near the river, and surrounded by trees. London, no doubt, would be healthier—better for us in all ways."

"You are not feeling ill, are you?" he said, hastily.

"No, father."

"It can't be much darker in London than here—that's one thing," he muttered.

"And the houses are much warmer," observed his daughter. "You will not have all the draughts

you have here. Rupert will be home, too, a whole hour earlier, and leave us a whole hour later than he does now. That will be a great thing, father, won't it?"

"But I have a long lease of the house, Olive, and I won't part with it at a loss. No, no; I'd rather remain where I am."

He settled himself back in his chair, as though he had relapsed into his former condition of mind, and were resolved to abide in it.

"It seems," said Olivia, quietly, "that the Cedars may be parted with to great advantage. At least, so Rupert says."

Mr. Marston turned sharply towards his daughter, but he said nothing. The mine, however, was sprung. Little by little, day after day, the work of overcoming his natural repugnance to the idea of any change was carried further. Olivia voluntarily accepted the position forced on her: to please Rupert and herself, their father was asked to make this great sacrifice of his wishes and personal comfort. It was an ungracious office, this apparently selfish pleading; and it moved Olivia to tears, seeing how the blind man dreaded all that was strange and unknown, to find him, in his undemonstrative love for his children, yielding to her gentle persistence. But, having once brought his mind over the bar of rough waters, the fine old man let himself drift in

silence whithersoever his children steered. The weakening of all his faculties tended to this result, no doubt. And the decision which Miss Pringle arrived at in the course of that week helped greatly, I believe, to reconcile him to the proposed change.

"My dear, as to your keeping all this a secret from your papa, it is perfect nonsense, you know. You can't keep your altered circumstances from him—how can you? Living in a poky lodging, with a maid-of-all-work to cook your dinner, my dear, how is it to be done? And that reminds me to tell you what I was going to say about myself. My health, as you know, is very delicate; I'm obliged to take great care of myself; and really I do feel as if I should be in your way, my dear, in a lodging, and living in the very different way you must now. And in a confined part of the town, too. No! much as I shall regret leaving you, my love, I feel it would not be right to indulge in the selfish wish to remain with you, though I shall, of course, *see* you very constantly, and I hope to be able to take you out by-and-by, when your affairs are a little set to rights. I dare say they won't turn out as bad, after all, as you expect."

Olivia smiled—a little sadly, perhaps. Had she been cynically disposed, she might have indulged her inclination at the expense of poor human nature. As it was, she only assured her aunt

(with entire sincerity) that she cordially approved of her resolution; and Olivia did not think it necessary to add that Miss Pringle's prospect of taking her "out" offered no temptation to her niece, and would certainly not be realised in their present altered circumstances.

A few days later the Cedars was sold by private contract to Mr. Rook, the auctioneer; and before the month was out a sale took place of nearly all the furniture, books, and pictures. Of furniture, enough was saved to fill the small apartment Rupert had taken in London; of books, all his father's and most of his sister's favourite authors were rescued; of pictures, since the blind man could sustain no sense of loss through these, none were spared. All with which he could by possibility come into contact—the silver and the fine damask for his own use at table, the choice old wine for his own drinking—were carefully put aside from the general wreck; and for the same reason, Olivia's piano. Through those senses left to him, the old and enfeebled man should never learn, if possible, the ruin which had overtaken all that he loved on earth.

CHAPTER X.

THE NEW HOME.

THE miserable spectacle, so often described, of a crowd of hook-nosed, dirty-looking men elbowing each other round a table, while almost as great a crowd of curious idlers are strolling through the rooms which they have never seen before, and while the appraiser's voice, and the sound of the hammer, and the buzz of indifferent conversation, rouse other echoes from those the quiet house has hitherto known—this miserable spectacle the Cedars witnessed at the end of September. Three days before that, Mr. Marston and his family moved into the apartments which were to be their home henceforward.

There is a street leading out of the Strand—no matter its name—at the end of which a row of

led him out, with Fritz's arm, upon the broad sunny pavement.

Rupert and Olivia were upon the second floor. It was the one drawback to this apartment—and everything must have *one* drawback at least—that the intervening floor was occupied. Mrs. Flaherty, the landlady, assured Olivia that it was impossible she or her father could sustain any discomfort on this score, since "the party" occupying the enviable position of first-floor lodger never slept there, and was the quietest gentleman that ever stepped, during the few hours he passed there daily. Not that he came there by any means every day, added Mrs. Flaherty (thereby justifying her nationality); on the contrary, a whole week would go by, sometimes, without his appearing. In short, if the first floor was to be let, it was clearly impossible for the tenant to be more innocuous, and in every way desirable. Still, it was a drawback that two flights of stairs should separate Olivia's room from her father's. Since his alarming illness, however, Fritz had always slept in his master's room, so that Rupert and his sister had no uneasiness in being thus far from their father at night.

Fritz was the only servant the Marstons kept. Mrs. Flaherty and her cook did the housework between them, and the helpful old German generally lent his hand in the kitchen in preparing some dish

for his master's special consumption. It was well that Rupert had not, like most young men in the present day, pampered his appetite to that degree of fastidiousness which leads an ill-dressed dinner to be regarded as one of the most serious punishments this life can award. The mutton at first *was* very often underdone, and had to be sent down in slices and broiled; and the memory of those leaden crusts under which a beefsteak was periodically buried—is it not as a nightmare unto them even now? For themselves, Rupert and Olivia bore their change of *cuisine*, as they had supported heavier trials, with equanimity. For their father, they were naturally anxious that this change should not be perceptible. With Fritz's help, and the doctrines of an old cookery-book of her mother's, which Olivia now studied sedulously, she succeeded in this with complete success. She went down into the kitchen herself; she helped the little maid to the measurement and proper mixing of ingredients. It was a sight to see her with knit brows expounding from the solemn text of Mrs. Glasse, in the kitchen of that London lodging-house. And she was rewarded as she deserved.

Mrs. Flaherty was not "a character." She was a common-place, kind-hearted old Irishwoman; rather shrewd, and very talkative, but generally inexact in all her statements; a devout Roman

Catholic, credulous as a child, and slatternly in appearance. She was the widow of an excise officer, and had seen "better days." But those were long ago. She had kept lodgings in London for the last five-and-twenty years; and there was, in consequence, a certain flavour of cockneydom stirred into this Hibernian compound. She occupied a room on the same floor as Olivia and her brother, but to the back. The floor above was at present unlet; and, though corresponding to what are generally garrets, it consisted of four comfortable and airy rooms. This, with the kitchen and Mrs. Flaherty's adjoining demesne, formed the whole house.

Rupert took his sister over their new home before he finally agreed to Mrs. Flaherty's offer; and as Olivia saw at once all the advantages it possessed for her father, the bargain was closed then and there. Little by little, Mr. Marston's mind was reconciled to the idea of living in London—*for his children's sakes*. They had found a house for him by the river-side—a sunny house and quiet. His rooms were on the ground floor; his two old friends would often come in here and see him; the bustle and business of London was near at hand for his children—for Rupert more especially. If he thought with regret, then or afterwards, of the soft velvet lawn on which he

used to walk in summer-time, of the cawing of the rooks and cooing of the doves, and the many peaceful country sounds which had cheered the great solitude of blindness, he hid the feeling away carefully out of his children's sight. Was the self-sacrifice and devotion all on one side? Not so.

The room into which they led him that still September afternoon, when Mr. Marston took his leave of the Cedars, had been made as like the library of their old home as furniture could make it. Had the eyes of the blind man been opened to look around him as he entered, he would not have learnt the change of fortune that had befallen him from the aspect of the room. There, along the side of the pale-green wall, with its rich cornice of white stucco, and over against the carved marble mantelpiece (both telling of the house's original estate), stood one of the walnut bookshelves saved from the sale. The Turkey carpet, the easy-chairs, Olivia's piano and her Davenport, a *jardinière* full of such plants as she thought would best stand the London air, and a Venetian leather screen, to shield from the draught of the open door the corner into which Mr. Marston's chair was drawn —these were household gods from the old temple transported to the new. The small parlour adjoining was equally comfortable; and into Mr. Mars-

ton's bedroom most of the old furniture had been moved, and arranged, as nearly as possible, in the way to which he was used. For Olivia's and Rupert's rooms, on the other hand, nothing but what was essential and of the simplest kind had been kept back. Upon the second floor their father would assuredly never set his foot.

Mr. Marston knew very little of London. Half a lifetime ago he had spent a few months there occasionally; but it had never been his home, and of its geography he was quite ignorant.

"Is the house well situated?" he had asked.

"Nothing can be better," was his daughter's reply. "Airy and sunny; not far from Northumberland House and Whitehall, which, as you remember, father, is a line of palaces. We have the river in front of us, too."

"And what size is the house—eh?"

"Oh, large; quite as large as we want—larger, indeed."

"And the stabling? I hope Rupert has been particular about there being good stabling?"

"There is stabling close at hand. Rupert will see to all that, father. You may make your mind quite easy."

"And the rent? He hasn't told me anything about that yet, Olive. He must tell me; though I haven't the head for accounts I had, still I must

know—do you hear? I can't afford to pay an exorbitant rent—remember that."

"No, dear father; but you can quite trust Rupert. You know you have given up everything into his hands, and he is so careful, you could not manage better yourself."

"Ah, well, I don't know about that; the boy hasn't any experience, and women don't understand anything about money matters, Olive."

"The house will cost you a great deal less than this, father," she replied, rather nervously.

"Um! Well, Rupert must explain to me about it. I can't be running into debt. Moving is a great expense. 'Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves.' Rupert must explain everything to me."

But the weakened state of Mr. Marston's mind, his incapacity of fixing it upon any one subject for long together, rendered it comparatively easy to turn his attention from such explanations. And when he was once established in his new home—when he had got to know the relative position of doors and windows, and the arrangement of chairs and tables—when he had once slid into that new groove of existence which, as far as he was concerned, at least, so closely resembled the old one, he contentedly accepted the change without question, or disquietude of any kind. Truly the blow

had been dealt in mercy which rendered it possible to conceal the truth from the once shrewd and keenly sensitive old man.

There was a small incident—a very small one—which happened a few days after they had entered their new home; it was this.

The afternoon was warm for the time of year: Mr. Marston had taken his walk, and now sat by the open window. Olivia took a volume of Travels from the bookcase to read to her father, and drew her chair, as usual, close to his. As she did so, the folds of her coarse stuff dress touched his hand. He took it up between his finger and thumb, and said, after a minute's pause—

"Why don't you wear something thinner such a warm day, child?"

"This is better for London; things get so dirty here, and washing is expensive."

"Hem! it seems to me like sackcloth. I used to like to hear the rustle of your silk gown."

"I've only one, which I keep for grand occasions." She did not say that all the others were sold, as useless to her now.

"When did I sign a cheque?" he asked, suddenly; "it seems a long time."

"We've enough money in the house to go on with, father."

"Well, go and buy yourself a gown. 'And ye

shall walk in silk attire,'" he quavered out. "Why, what must your aunt have said when she saw you in that sackcloth—eh? I'll be bound she found it reminded her, somehow or other, of one of her old conquests."

Olivia laughed. "It is no use wearing smart dresses with only the smoky sparrows to see one. There is no one in town now, father. Even Aunt Clo, you know, is going to Margate. I don't want another gown now."

"Hem! I'm afraid—that is, I suppose she's not going to stay there, is she?"

"No; she's going to take a small house in Bayswater."

"Ah! that's where the fire was, Fritz was reading to me about. Terrible! I should like to send the poor souls something—a mother and five children—ta—ta! Let the parson have five pounds for them, child, without any name, will you? and then there's an end of *that*."

This was one of the trials she was so often subject to, when she had to evade the old man's charitable injunctions, which she was quite unable to obey, and then to satisfy him on the subject as best she might. Fortunately, his memory often failed him now; his old acuteness only returned by fits and starts.

One evening he was asleep when Rupert entered.

"What news from the City?" asked Mr. Marston, starting up with sudden alacrity. "What is the state of the funds—eh?"

"Consols firm at 93, father," said Rupert, with a half smile, half sigh.

"And no more absurd reports about Lozados—eh, Rupert? You're not going to try and frighten me again about him, I suppose, are you?"

"No, I am never going to try and frighten you again about him, father."

He turned to his sister after a moment's pause, and said:

"Whose death do you think I have just seen in the paper?—Lionel Pomfret's."

"Good heavens, how sudden! Where was it?"

"At Ems, on the 5th—a fortnight ago. I'm not surprised; he always looked an unhealthy fellow."

"I am very sorry for his poor mother."

"Have you ever written to them yet, Olive?"

"No; but I will do so now, of course."

"You promised to let them hear in case you had anything to tell them—don't you remember? They were so kind to you, that you've no right to keep them in ignorance of all that has befallen us, and of our present residence. It's quite different with all our other neighbours at Fordingham. I have made it generally understood that,

as circumstances now oblige us to live in strict retirement, you didn't wish to receive visits in London. I have therefore declined giving our address to the numerous well meant applications that have been made to me at Mr. Claxton's, to learn where you were to be found."

"That is just what I wished. It would bore me to death, Rupert, to have to receive the condolences of the Blighs and the Wellses, and all the tribes of Fordingham; and my time is even more occupied than it used to be. Indeed, that is the reason I have not yet written to Mrs. Pomfret. I fully meant to do so. I will write to-morrow. Shall I give any message from you?"

"Oh, remember me to them, and say I'm very sorry—something of that sort, you know; and mind you inquire particularly how my little friend the schoolgirl is. What is her name? Mary, ain't it? Nice little thing."

"Yes. By-the-bye, Aunt Clo was here to-day. She came in a new green bonnet, and brought me a present. What do you think it was? An old blonde dress, in which she used to dance at the Cheltenham Assembly Rooms fifty years ago, I should think. She kindly proposed to take me to Jullien's Promenade Concerts also."

The brother and sister laughed together; and Rupert, leaning over to his father, said:

"Miss Pringle sat with you some time, I hear, to-day? I hope she made herself agreeable, and that you enjoyed her visit."

"Hem! very good of her to come. She's gone though, I hope, ain't she? She's not going to stay? Ah! gone to Margate—that's all right."

And on having his doubts reassured, Mr. Marston gave a sigh of satisfaction.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LODGER ON THE FIRST FLOOR.

It will be seen that the chances of Julian Westbrook's discovering Olivia's present residence were remote. Had he been a genuine hero of romance, he would, no doubt, have caused Rupert to be followed from Mr. Claxton's office some afternoon, and traced to his sister's home; and he would then have dogged the young lady's steps pertinaciously till he *accidentally* came across her path. As it was, he did nothing of the sort. He made inquiries of every one whom he thought in the least likely to possess the information he sought; and he cursed Fortune for denying it to him. But Fortune treated him as she generally does those who behave so uncivilly to her—with contempt. During the long winter months that

followed—when Julian, from some cause or other, was detained in town, the Pomfrets being abroad, and most of his intimate friends in the country —the idle man of pleasure would have found a source of permanent interest in the cultivation of that passion which had attained to a certain growth during the past summer. For some time his vexation took a moody, misanthropic turn. He was angry with himself for having lost his opportunity; he was cross with the world (which was hunting in Leicestershire just then, and Julian didn't hunt); he was, above all, irritated against the whole of the fair sex collectively. He thought, or tried to think, that he had good reason to complain on this head—not an uncommon condition of mind with men like Julian. He was an ill-used man. He repeated this to himself every drizzly December afternoon that he rode down to Fordingham (having nothing in the world to do in London), and cultivated sentiment by letting his hack wander, at foot's pace, among the lanes surrounding the Cedars.

It is now time that I should speak of Mrs. Flaherty's first-floor lodger, whose eccentric tenure of his apartment excited Olivia's curiosity, it must be confessed, after she had once seen him. This was not until she had been for several weeks in her new home, during which time "the first

floor" came most mornings, vanishing again towards dusk, and remaining silent and invisible, in his rooms during the intervening hours. No bell ever rang from the first floor; no visitor was ever known to come there. The lodger carried away the key in his pocket every evening, and Mrs. Flaherty's desecrating brooms and dusters were only admitted at certain long intervals of time, the lodger not choosing to have his rooms "set to rights" during his absence. All this was a subject of profound indifference to Miss Marston, and she turned a deaf ear when Mrs. Flaherty began dilating upon the strange conduct of her "first floor," combined with his punctuality of payment, and his princely liberality in small matters. It was a subject of profound indifference to Olivia, I repeat, until she had seen this Mr. Thompson—for such was the unromantic name he bore—and then she began to feel a curiosity to hear something about him.

It was late in the afternoon—about the hour that Rupert generally returned—and Olivia, having left her father asleep, was going up to her own room for a few minutes, when, as she closed the sitting-room door softly behind her, she saw the figure of a man descending the stairs. She was so unaccustomed to see any man but her brother about the house, that she had begun to forget the

possibility of meeting a stranger upon that common territory, the staircase.

"Rupert," she said, as she advanced towards the figure, which was now within a few steps of the bottom one, "don't disturb my father; he is asleep. I didn't know you were come in."

She started back as she finished speaking, for the person who now stood close to her was a stranger.

Though dusk, it was still possible to distinguish his features as he raised his hat and bowed. He was not a very young man; a little bald about the temples; somewhat above the middle height; and of a square and powerful build. The lines of the face were full of mastery. The broad, massive brow; the aquiline nose; the large mouth, clasped so firmly under the short auburn moustache; the square, somewhat protruding chin, softened by its short beard, indicated a character of no common force. The expression of the eyes was sad, almost stern. But of all this Olivia saw nothing—nothing but that a middle-aged man, with a fine head, and the manners of a perfect gentleman, stood for an instant before her. His clothes looked rather shabby; he carried an oblong parcel under his arm; yet the man was unmistakably a gentleman. In the glance she had of his head, it re-

minded her of a portrait in the Pitti Palace which she had often thought about.

He had the good taste not to notice her mistake otherwise than by that silent bow. He passed on; and before Olivia had recovered from her surprise, he was gone.

When Mrs. Flaherty came up, ten minutes afterwards, to close Miss Marston's shutters, she found her leaning out of window, over the quickly darkening river.

"I suppose it was Mr. Thompson I met on the stairs just now—a tall man, dressed in black?"

"Sure and that'll be Mr. Thompson himself, miss. For what 'd I be havin' other gintlemin in the house for, save and except your brother, miss, and me a lone woman, as has always kep' me house respectable? And no one in the Row as can say a word agin me, though that Mrs. Burke is as spiteful as ever she can be, and——"

"Yes, I know, Mrs. Flaherty; but I wanted to ask you about Mr. Thompson. Do you know anything about him? How long has he had these lodgings?"

"Somethin' betther nor three months, miss. And a noble cha*rak*ter he is, is Mr. Thompson, that niver looks at both sides of a half-crown. But as to where he come from, and where he go to,

and why he be so shockin' melancholy,—faith! it's not Biddy Flaherty that gossips and pries into her lodgers' sacrets, miss, nor tells all down the Row what ye have for dinner, nor how much linen goes to the wash in the week, as *some* does. Lord bless y'r sowl, miss, if I'd ha' chose it, I could ha' found out, in coorse, where he come from; but he pays me me rint reg'lar, and is a princely-hearted gintleman—and the rist is no consarn of mine. Is it now, miss?"

"Of course not, Mrs. Flaherty. You cannot be sufficiently thankful that you have such a model lodger. I suppose you don't know, then, what it is makes him come here during the day and go away at night?"

"I think," said Mrs. Flaherty, with knit brows, as though she were solving some difficult problem, "that he must be a scholard, or a doctor, or somethin'. He's a deal o' books about—which gits covered with dust afore iver he'll let me in to clane them—and papers with feet and hands and bowns; and sich a shockin' thing as I come upon last time I was there—it gave me quite a turn!—a man's bawdy, with all the flish and sinews drawed as nat'ral as life, and no skin on it! And thin he has a great boord covered over whiniver I comes in—somethin' medical, for sure—and a tin box of instruments, as I take it, which he tould me

niver to touch. I wouldn't, bless me sowl, for all the world, for fear o' poison!"

"And there is a strong smell of turpentine—is there not?" asked Olivia.

"That's thrue for you, miss, sure enough. And how could ye be guessin' that, now?"

"Your lodger is an artist—a painter, Mrs. Flaherty. I see it all. He comes here to paint, for the sake of much purer and clearer light than he can have in the dingy part of London he probably inhabits."

This view of the case did not recommend itself very strongly to Mrs. Flaherty. She seemed to apprehend that the dignity of her "first floor" must suffer from the supposition that he painted "pictures to sell"—"which ain't in no ways likely," she added, with some show of reason, "for no one iver comes here, and he niver takes nothin' away—so how can he sell pictures, miss? which is as free with his money as can be! No, faith! me belief is that he's a *scholard*," concluded Mrs. Flaherty, knitting her brows once more; and this reconciled every difficulty in the good woman's mind.

Olivia did not pursue the discussion further. She had no stronger argument than she had used to oppose to Mrs. Flaherty's plausible one, even had she felt disposed to continue this guesswork;

[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [

saw no one. For myself, my business habits prevented my paying visits. He looked annoyed, and said he couldn't believe that *you* would refuse to see him if you knew that an old friend was desirous of making his inquiries after you in person."

"I always told you, Rupert," she said, very quietly, "that he was not as worldly as you thought—that he had more heart. The change in our worldly position would not influence him. But it is much better that he should not come here. You are quite right."

"If I disliked his coming to the Cedars, Olive, of course I should dislike it doubly here. There is every reason against it. Among others, one I have said nothing to you about as yet—for nothing was settled. But this very day, curiously enough, Mr. Claxton has spoken again of the probability of his wishing to send me to the West Indies for two or three months, to visit certain property there, and settle some disputes which it is difficult to do at home. His placing this trust in me is very complimentary, and, as such, I can hardly refuse it; for it will raise my position in the house, and my salary, very considerably. The drawback, of course, Olive, is leaving you and my father here; but it will not be for long—three or four months at most, I believe."

"You mustn't let any thought of us trouble

you," said his sister, laying her hand upon his arm; "we shall do very well during your absence, and I am delighted that Mr. Claxton should place this trust in you. I wouldn't for the world have it otherwise, dear."

"You're not afraid of being alone in a London lodging with my father? You wouldn't have anyone with you during my absence?"

"Certainly not. What should I be afraid of? Nothing can be quieter than this house. My life, as you know, runs like a piece of clockwork now, without the very smallest variation from day to day. And I am quite content that it should be so. Therefore you may leave me, Rupert, with a quiet mind. You will go to the other side of the globe, and come back and find me stitching away as you left me; and I shall probably not exchange half a dozen words with any one but Mrs. Flaherty and Aunt Clo during your absence."

"That is just what I should wish, Olive, and that is why I should particularly object to Westbrook's finding his way here now. It seems brutal to condemn you to this solitude, my dear; but I know the world, and I know you must be doubly careful when you are virtually left alone. You have no women-friends; and as to men, if you should want assistance or advice during my absence, you have Mr. Claxton to apply to—the

kindest man alive. In our present position, the quieter you keep, the fewer people you see, the better. It shan't be always so; but while I am away you must promise me to close your convent-doors more carefully than ever."

There was, no doubt, a certain savour of pride in what Rupert believed to be simply a wise prevision for his sister's welfare. But wise and foolish alike, how futile are such previsions against the great network of circumstances which life is perpetually weaving around us!

Three weeks later, Rupert Marston embarked at Southampton for Jamaica.

CHAPTER XII.

DROPPED ON THE STAIRS.

THE condition of Olivia Marston's mind at this time was one common enough in real life, I believe, especially among women of imagination and sensibility, but seldom permitted by novelists to their first-class heroines. She had been dazzled and captivated for a season by a man of a very inferior stamp. The strong hand of her brother had held her back before it had been too late; yet still her eyes were scarcely opened to behold good from evil. She could not but believe still that Rupert was unjust towards Westbrook.

She had not given up in her heart of hearts "making allowances" for him: the energy with which she agreed with Rupert that Westbrook was not to come to the house, proved, perhaps more

than anything, that she mistrusted her own strength.

Olivia had been too much occupied about others during the past three months to think of herself, and to indulge in any sentimentality, had she been so disposed.

Active work is the best antidote for every species of moral disease; and as yet the girl's healthy mind could scarcely be said to have imbibed any infection. The time was come, however, now that she was to be silent during all the long evenings that her father dozed, and companionless at the early breakfasts, when her mind, with so many additional hours for reflection, might not improbably return to the happy days of the past spring, and linger over them. An incident apparently trivial, but fraught with grave consequences, occurred just then.

It was early in January when Rupert sailed. In the course of the following week Mrs. Flaherty told Olivia, with a radiant face, that her third floor was at last let, and let very well too, to a quiet elderly lady named Crosbie and her niece. Unexceptionable references: The Rev. Mr. Sparshott, Union Chapel; and Mr. Jonas Unguent, Secretary to the Society for the Secret Distribution of Tracts in the Papal States. The ladies were to take possession in a few days.

Olivia was sitting at the parlour window when the cab containing the new lodgers arrived. There was a great deal of luggage, comprising sundry hair-trunks, bandboxes, and paper-parcels; an old-fashioned desk in a green baize cover, several music-books, and a birdcage. A thin woman of fifty, with a hard pinched face and grey hair, dressed in black, stepped from the cab. There was a general hollowness about this person's figure, as though the front of it had been scooped out, and the shoulders were penuriously trying to meet, which suited the expression of her face. Olivia had full opportunity to watch it, as its owner stood haggling with the cabman over his fare. To her companion this operation seemed to be profoundly displeasing. She knit her brow and bit her pretty lips, and after supplicating the elder lady to yield to the man's demand, however great the extortion might be, she drew out a smart leather purse from her own pocket, and, placing a shilling in the man's hand, ran swiftly up the steps of the house, leaving her companion to follow.

The contrast between aunt and niece, if such they were, was indeed complete. A little plump figure, a complexion of lilies and roses, a profusion of golden hair, a lovely little *nez retroussé*, with delicate nostrils, like pale pink shells, the whitest teeth, the neatest ankle, the sweetest, most child-

like expression of face—Olivia examined her attentively as she stood there, with the birdcage in her hand, tapping impatiently with her foot, while her aunt discussed the extra shilling with cabby. And Olivia made up her mind that this was one of the prettiest creatures she had ever beheld. The flaw—for of course a woman's keen scrutiny detected the flaw—was in her eyes. They were small grey eyes; with a greenish light in them, and were not altogether harmonious with the rest of the face—though capable of more expression, possibly, than softer eyes might have been. They were like the eyes of a clever child, clear and keen, unless when veiled by the mist of tender emotion, and appearing, when under the influence of passion, to burn up until the pupils became no more than two specks of concentrated flame. It is probable that she saw Olivia at the window; for just when her impatience at the squabble between her aunt and cabby was most demonstrative, she turned her head quickly round, and then it was she drew out her own purse. Her dress formed as great a contrast to her aunt's as everything else about her: it was bright and gay, though in good taste, and certainly did not indicate poverty.

At an early hour two or three mornings after, Olivia heard from the room above hers the sound of a powerful high voice practising scales and exer-

cises, followed by Italian Opera airs, certain passages in which were sung over and over again, until the singer had attained greater precision of execution. Olivia then threw up her window; her neighbour overhead had already opened hers. It was a fine winter's morning; a thin frosty mist hung over the river, through which the sun was beginning to gleam; and the canary upon the window-ledge up above, rejoicing in those first rays, was emulating his mistress in his wild flights of song. Though the harmony thus produced was doubtful, Olivia listened with pleasure. A bird's song and a fresh voice in the early morning have hints of the country and of spring-time in them, doubly dear in murky London. Presently the singer left off, and came to the window. Then followed a trio, of which Olivia caught some fragments.

"Oh, zu noisy Dicky! eat this sugar, sir, and be quiet—do. I can't hear myself, zu make such a row, zu troublesome Dicky! Three times I've tried to get that B flat, and——"

"Clara," said a harsh voice, belonging no doubt to Mrs. Crosbie, "you'll have no voice to-night if you remain at that window. Come away, and don't be a fool with that bird."

"Twee-twee-twee-twee-twee," remonstrated Dicky, in a high counter-treble.

"No, Dicky!" broke in the soprano with a light laugh. It's no use, zu foolish little bird. We must come away from the window, because a nasty cross aunt says we must, and I shall throw a cloth over your cage, zu chatterbox. Come, give me a kiss."

And Olivia, raising her eyes, could see the fair face of the young singer pouting her rosy lips forward towards the cage, which she had swung outside the ledge, and the occupant of which, twittering as he hopped along his perch, thrust his little beak through the bars to greet his mistress.

"Come, Clara," rose the harsh contralto voice in the trio once more, "don't fool away your time there; it worrits me to death, it does; and there's your rehearsal at eleven o'clock too, and you haven't gone through your part yet. You're the most thoughtless creature! I do believe you'd lose your head if I wasn't there to look after you. To think you're a married woman, too, going on just for all the world like a child. I wonder you're not ashamed."

The married woman knit her pretty brows and hummed in a sort of wilful, defiant way, as she looked up and down the river, without vouchsafing any reply; then, unhooking the cage, she muttered, as she took it in—"Well, Dicky, zu and I will fly

away together some day, won't we?" And the window was shut down.

The listener below sat pondering some time as to the history and condition of the lodgers overhead. It seemed that the younger lady was a professional singer, and, stranger still, that she was a married woman.

In such an uneventful life as Olivia's even a trifling incident is capable of stirring the still water, as the smallest pebble dropped into a well creates a disturbance little commensurate with its size. And before the afternoon was past this pebble was followed by another.

Olivia heard the two ladies pass her door and go down-stairs, towards noon. A few minutes later she herself went out, having a commission in the Strand, which she took advantage of her father's being on the terrace with Fritz's arm to execute, so that he should not miss her. As she opened the house door, Mr. Thompson was just putting in his latch-key to enter. He drew back and bowed. They had not seen each other face to face since that evening nearly a month ago. This time their eyes met, and Olivia felt that his were bent with keen scrutiny on hers.

When she reached home half an hour later, a letter directed to her was lying on the table. It was carefully sealed with a coat of arms sur-

mounted with the crest of a man in armour; for Olivia, after the manner of many women, inspected the letter minutely before opening it, instead of taking the more obvious method of satisfying her curiosity at once.

The letter contained another, crumpled, and the envelope of which was partially torn. Upon the half-sheet of paper which enclosed it were written these words:

"Mr. Thompson presents his compliments to Miss Marston, and begs to enclose a letter which he believes belongs to her, as he found it on the stairs a few minutes ago."

All that was left of the superscription on the enclosed letter was the syllable *ston*, and the words *Terrace, Strand.* The writing did not seem altogether unfamiliar to Olivia, though she felt sure the letter was not hers. It might be Rupert's; but if so, how did it come upon the stairs, nearly three weeks after he had sailed?

To satisfy herself on this point she opened the letter, though not without a certain hesitation.

It began, without name or other indication to whom the words were addressed, thus:

"What is the use of recrimination? Your conduct has certainly deprived you of any right——"

She read no more, but hastily turned the leaf and looked for the signature. There was none.

intended. Was she to allow him to continue to believe that this person was herself? On the other hand, was she justified in delivering back into a stranger's hands so important a paper, now that she knew positively whose it was? She decided without much hesitation that she was not so justified.

She dropped the letter into a larger cover, within which she wrote, on a separate sheet, these words:

"Miss Marston presents her compliments to Mrs. Elliston, and begs to return her a letter found on the stairs this afternoon, and which was brought by mistake to Miss Marston. The torn state of the cover will account for this, together with the last syllable of both names being the same; but Miss Marston, seeing at a glance that the letter is not hers, loses no time in restoring it into Mrs. Elliston's hands."

Half an hour later the ladies returned; and Fritz, knocking at the door of the third floor, gave the letter to Mrs. Elliston herself.

It certainly in no way concerned Olivia what the new lodger's correspondence or past history might be, yet she could not avoid some speculation on the subject. She was puzzled, and rather annoyed, by the circumstance altogether: puzzled, inasmuch as the handwriting certainly seemed one

she knew; annoyed, because of the part she herself played in this, as regarded the lodger on the first floor. She said to herself that it was of little importance, after all, what this painter thought about her; but still she was annoyed.

By-and-by, with her shawl and bonnet on her arm, she stole from the room where her father dozed, to make her simple toilette arrangements defore dinner.

Just as she reached the first landing, Mr. Thompson came out of his room. He turned the key of the door, and pocketed it; he was leaving his apartment, as usual, for the day. Olivia hesitated a moment; then her foreign breeding emboldened her to do with perfect simplicity what to many English girls would have seemed difficult, if not impossible.

"Sir," she said, turning round, with her hand upon the banister, and her clear truthful eyes raised to his, "you sent me a letter to-day which you found upon the stairs, I think? I wish you to know that it was not mine—that it was not addressed to me. I did not trouble you with it again, for I learnt who was its rightful owner, and I have returned it to her."

This Mr. Thompson was an odd man. He bowed, and looked at her with a strange puzzled expres-

sion of face, in which admiration was blent with something else half sad, half cynical; but he said nothing.

He stood there for a moment, looking after her as she passed upwards; then, with a sigh, he went down the stair, and left the house.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LODGER ON THE THIRD FLOOR.

THERE was a knock at the door. "Come in," said Olivia. She was standing before the glass as the door opened, and Mrs. Elliston appeared.

Olivia looked at her visitor with some surprise. Mrs. Elliston was pale, but even prettier than Olivia had thought. She closed the door quietly, and drew near Miss Marston, lowering her eyes as she did so. Then she spoke, rapidly and somewhat indistinctly, for her voice trembled.

"You sent me a letter just now, Miss Marston?"

"I did."

"I am come here to implore a great favour of you. You read it; of course you did. You could not have known it was mine, otherwise. You are

kind—you are good—I know you are. Oh! for God's sake, don't—*don't*——"

"Mrs. Elliston, I read nothing but the first two lines of that letter. You may rest perfectly satisfied that I know nothing of the contents. Mrs. Flaherty recognised the cover of the letter, as having given it to you this morning. That is how I came to know it was yours."

"You are generous," said her visitor, shaking her head, and colouring. "You wish to spare me; but, oh! Miss Marston, I think—I do believe that I may trust you. I do not think, with that face, you would betray me. If you will swear to keep my secret, I will tell you all—*all*——"

"Stop. Pray consider what you are saying. I am a perfect stranger to you. I have no wish to hear your confidences. I repeat that I did *not* read that letter, and can assure you I know nothing whatever of your affairs."

Mrs. Elliston scanned Olivia's face keenly. Then, with the impetuous movement of a child, she seized her hand.

"If so, you are a wonderful woman. Not to read an open letter! But I am not afraid of you. Ah! if you would only be my friend. Do you know, I haven't a friend in the world."

"Not a friend? . . . . Are you not living with an aunt?"

"Oh, yes"—here she sighed; "but as to ever making a *friend* of her—as to ever telling her anything—you don't know what my life is with her."

"Is she not kind to you?"

"Oh, in her own way; but she is so stingy and straightlaced, and she leads me such a life. She hasn't a grain of imagination or enthusiasm, poor woman, and she can't understand anything. It's a dreadful trial to live with her. She worries me from morning till night, and I'm sure I can't help it."

"Can't help what?" asked Olivia, bluntly.

"Doing things she doesn't like. If she ever *was* young she forgets it, and expects every one to pass their life as she does, in preaching, and scolding, and praying. Isn't it hard to be *always* doing what's right?"

Olivia could not help smiling.

"Not only hard, but impossible," she said. "Why do you live with your aunt if you dislike it so very much?"

"Why, you see, I was still a girl when I became a widow."

"Oh! you are a widow?"

"Yes, that was more than three years ago; and they all said that I—I was too young to live alone, particularly being on the stage."

"You sing at a theatre, then, do you?"

"Yes, saloons and theatres I've *been* singing at —that was only because I was beginning, you know. Now they say I'm quite fit for the Italian Opera, only I shall never get an engagement if I don't change my name. I've a splendid voice."

Olivia smiled at this *naïf* announcement.

"And I'm so fond of it!" she continued. "There's nothing in the world I love so much; and when I act, I forget everything in the excitement. And then the applause afterwards! Only Aunt Crosbie is such a damper to one's spirits—she can't understand an artiste's enthusiasm. And *oh!* her preaching!"

"Poor little thing!" thought Olivia; "obliged to work for her bread, and, with this excitable temperament, condemned to live with a cross old woman—it is a hard lot."

Still the recollection of that letter obtruded itself not altogether pleasantly.

"Does your aunt go with you always to the theatre, Mrs. Elliston?"

"Generally, when she is not laid up with rheumatism. Will you go with me next time? Oh, do. I don't think Aunt Crosbie can go on Monday; she's quite laid up to-day."

"I never leave my father of an evening," said Olivia quietly, as though the proposal were not an

unusual one. "But I can fancy that Mrs. Crosbie doesn't like your going alone. You are too young and pretty for that."

"That is what they all say," pouted the little widow. "It is better to be old and ugly, I believe, for then one is left in peace to do as one likes. Oh, dear me!" she added, with a piteous sigh, "I've had trouble enough, I'm sure. This life is very hard indeed to women who are not made of iron and granite. Don't you think so?"

Olivia looked into that rosebud face; it seemed strange that suffering should have left absolutely no trace there.

"All of us, I suppose, have our trials, men and women alike; if, as you say, we are not made of granite."

"Oh! as to men, I never pity *them*. A married woman, I suppose you think, oughtn't to say so? But I wasn't happy in my married life."

"It must have been a very short one?"

"More than two years," she replied.

The little woman's eyes were filled with tears, and again Olivia's heart-strings were loosened towards her. But as she did not see exactly what to say, she remained silent. Mrs. Elliston went on:

"I have suffered too much through men to have

much feeling or much opinion of them. But I have no right to intrude my troubles on you," she added, quickly, as though she had been surprised into saying more than she intended. She looked with those small but penetrating eyes of hers into Olivia's face once more, and then began a fresh sentence. "You are very kind to me. Few women would be so kind to another whom they knew nothing about. I wish—would it be asking too much?—I wish I might come and see you sometimes."

Had Olivia been a prudent English-bred young lady, she would have offered no encouragement to an acquaintanceship begun under such strange auspices. As it was, she felt touched by the forlorn condition of the little singer. Could it do her any harm to stretch forth a kindly hand towards her?

"We are very near neighbours," she began. "If I can be of any use to you at any time——"

"Oh! may I come and sit with you sometimes? If you will only let me come and talk to you about myself, when Aunt Crosbie worries me, you don't know what a comfort it will be."

"I am almost always with my father, and he doesn't see strangers," said Olivia. Then, because her kind heart felt for the young woman, she added, with a little hesitation, "but when I am alone,

if you want anything—if I can do anything for you——"

"Will you come and see Aunt Crosbie? It will be so kind of you, Miss Marston. I don't know how I can be bold enough to ask you, for she is *very* disagreeable, poor old soul! But she is laid up now, and it will put her into better humour with me, perhaps, and you'll see, too, what I've got to put up with. And then I can sing to you. I should like you to hear me sing. You haven't got a piano, I suppose? You don't know what an effect I make in 'Ah! non credea.' They said I drew tears from a Cabinet minister and two members of Parliament one night."

Olivia was amused and laughed, as she would at the vain but innocent prattle of a child.

"I shall like very much to hear you sing, but it must be in your own room some day. My piano is down-stairs where my father sits, and he doesn't see strangers. I have heard you, however, already through the ceiling, and know that you have a lovely voice. I have often wished my brother could hear you, he is so passionately fond of music."

"What! have you a brother?" said the little widow, opening her eyes. "I thought you were an only child. Where is your brother, Miss Marston?"

"A long way off just now. In the West Indies."

"And how long is he going to remain there?"

"I hope not many months. He is in Mr. Claxton's house, and they have sent Rupert on a special mission——"

"*Rupert!* and *Claxton!* Dear me, it must be the same young man! How very odd. Isn't your brother dark, with a hooked nose? And he has no whiskers, only a very small moustache?"

"Yes. Where have you ever met him?"

Mrs. Elliston laughed very merrily.

"Only once, in an omnibus, some months ago; but, you see, he made an impression. We never spoke, only he did stare so *very* much that I couldn't help noticing him more than I should otherwise have done, particularly as he sat just opposite, and was so polite in jumping out to help me, and in picking up all the music I dropped, and in hailing the other omnibus—the Highgate one—for me. Oh, I should know him anywhere again."

"But, after all, how do you know it was my brother? How did you find out his name?"

"He had a lot of letters and papers in his hand
law or business things of some kind, I suppose,
most of them were directed in a large clerkly
—and sitting where I did, I couldn't help

seeing the address on one or two: 'Rupert Marston, Esq., at Messrs. Claxton's, Broadway.' "

"There can be no doubt about it," said Olivia; "and now I come to think of it, I remember his mentioning having met you. It must have been you from the description."

"It is quite like some sort of tie—some kind of introduction, isn't it? I must run away now, Miss Marston, for my aunt's dinner is waiting; but I am so glad to have made your acquaintance. And only think of its being all through that horrid letter. Oh! you can't tell how you have relieved my mind. I am sure you are a woman whom I can trust and make a friend of. Do, please, be my friend—won't you?"

She looked up once more in her pretty childish way, and Olivia felt more strongly than ever the kind of fascination which a seductive kitten exercises over certain natures—a foolish little animal, with not half the fine qualities of a horse or a dog, but asking to be caressed, and impossible not to be forgiven its tricks and petty misdemeanours.

She promised to call on Mrs. Crosbie the first day that she was free; and having extracted this promise, Mrs. Elliston departed.

CHAPTER XIV.

FROM JAMAICA TO LONDON AND BACK.

A FEW days later brought Rupert's first letter, by the mail which left Jamaica a fortnight after his arrival there. He wrote in good spirits, and gave an excellent account of himself. The climate at that season was charming, "and in three or four months," he wrote, "I expect my business here will be concluded and I shall be home again. Mind you tell me everything that happens, for I can't help being anxious about you. I wish you had some one woman friend near you; however, [illegible]ease God, you will not be left alone very long. [illegible] life here is likely to be very uneventful. The [illegible]lement of plantation accounts, the examination [illegible] returns, and invoices, and claims, fill up my

day. I have no society—no ladies' society, that is to say—but I have made the acquaintance of a right good fellow who is quartered here—Henry Pomfret. We met by accident, and I knew him at once from his likeness to his youngest sister. He is uncommonly handsome, and has that cheery off-hand manner which army men so often acquire, and City men seldom do. I have dined at his mess twice. He is as different from that poor creature Lionel as chalk from cheese. I am sorry to say he leaves for England in a few weeks' time, as he has sent in his papers to sell. Heirs apparent can't be allowed to waste their sweetness in Jamaica. He is going to join his people at Nice; but they are all to be in England in the summer, he says. Caverton is to be sold; Mrs. Pomfret dislikes the idea of returning there. They will probably take some other place in another part of the country."

In Olivia's answer to this letter, by the next mail, she wrote thus of her father:

"He sleeps more, and is more disinclined to exertion than formerly; otherwise he is really very little changed. He *can* walk as well as ever again, but always tries to avoid his little treadmill if possible. He is so patient—so unsuspicious. I have never had any difficulty in keeping all that

would be painful from him. He is certainly deafer, and takes less notice of things—that makes it easier. Don't be the least anxious about me. I never was better, and I assure you I want no 'woman friend,' though, in an unexpected way, one has appeared on my very narrow stage. We have two new lodgers *au troisième*, an aunt and niece; the latter an acquaintance of yours—at least you very vividly and faithfully described her to us some eight months ago. There is a puzzle for you! Do you remember a wonderfully pretty little person you once met in an omnibus, and came home raving about? She remembers *you* perfectly; even recollected your name, which she read on the back of your letters. We became acquainted by her dropping something on the stairs. She lives with an old dragon of an aunt, who is a Dissenter as far as I can make out, and, curious to say, the niece is on the stage—an odd combination. To complete the strangeness of this child-like little person's position, she is a *widow*. I could scarcely believe it when she told me. Her naïve vanity is so amusing! there cannot be any guile, I think, about such a nature; and her position with this cross old aunt rather excites my interest. So, in all probability, as the poor little thing seems very friendless, and grateful for any word of kindness, we shall often meet.

"Mr. Thompson is still a mystery. Except Mrs. Flaherty, no one has ever yet heard the sound of his voice. We have met on the stairs, and once I even spoke to him about something that had been dropped, but he only made me a solemn bow and passed on. I fancy Christopher Columbus in a shabby coat would not have been unlike our 'first floor.' I am glad you have met Henry Pomfret; it may lead to your renewing your intimacy with them some day. They have not answered my letter. How I look forward to your return! I am never sad or dull—you mustn't think that. I have plenty to occupy me, only it seems so cheerless of an evening to see your empty chair instead of you. . . . Aunt Clo comes here about once a week; she is much occupied now with a new, grand, and delightful friend of hers, Mrs. Quintus Smith. She asked me to go with a large party, headed by this Mrs. Q. S., to German Reed's on Monday last. Aunt Clo was very indignant that I was not duly impressed by the honour done me. She told me if I didn't 'mix,' I should never 'settle.' It sounds quite culinary, doesn't it?

"Father says that 'sending love' is a very absurd fashion. If people are properly attached, why, it is a matter of course; and if they are not,

CHAPTER XV.

TWO AUNTS.

Miss Pringle is paying one of her weekly visits to her brother-in-law and niece.

She now lives in a small house in Bayswater, which she has taken furnished by the year, and where she gives frequent tea-parties, with whist, to such of her acquaintance as are open to these seductions. The house is in a region of new brick and mortar, and is reached from London through acres and acres of dry, uninteresting streets, but it is not far from Kensington Gar-[illegible], and it is eminently "a genteel residence,' [illegible]iss Pringle is well contented.

[illegible]e is often urgent on Olivia "to mix," and [illegible]sionally presents her with some impossible [illegible] of finery as an incentive to that end; at the

same time she most scrupulously guards the secret of Olivia's present abode, though moved thereto by other motives than her niece's. But, indeed, it is not uncommon in life to see very different causes conduce to one result.

Let us hear what she says on this matter in the course of that morning's visit.

"My dear, who do you think I met in the Burlington Arcade this afternoon? You can't possibly guess. Your admirer, the big man, who used to trumpet away of an evening at the Pomfrets, and who rowed up the river so often and was vastly civil about the ball. What's his name? —Westbrook, that's it. He immediately rushed up; it was really very flattering, though I was rather embarrassed. I was looking at a bonnet in the window of that shop on the left-hand side going up—a sweet thing in pink—when I heard my name, and, turning round, found the big man bending over me. And really, in the Burlington Arcade, and altogether, I was quite—I scarcely knew whether—in short, I was a little *confused* for a moment, seeing people stare so as they passed at the meeting, which looked, you know—though, indeed, I should think they ought to be pretty well accustomed to that *sort* of thing *there*. However, he was most polite, and saw me to my brougham

[illegible]

fully. "You used to like talking to the young man, I remember, and thought his trumpet delightful, I believe. And he rowed in a great heat several times to the Cedars, and you seemed to think him vastly agreeable, when he sat on the lawn and smoked—so I couldn't tell, my dear, that you mightn't like to see him again."

"If I had wished it, aunt, should I have taken any pains to conceal where we are living?"

"Why, as to that, one would be really ashamed to ask any one to come *here*, down in this low neighbourhood, by the river. I do hope, when Rupert returns, that you may be able to move to something a little more respectable, my love."

"Half the nobility lived here a century or two ago; Northumberland House is within a stone's throw of us."

"Well, my dear, I am glad *I* am not compelled to live here—that's all. I am sure, with my select circle of friends, I should lose half of them." (Olivia thought this not impossible, and moralised on the worth of such "friendships," when Aunt Clo had taken her departure.) "I never *could* expect Mrs. Quintus Smith, for instance, to come down here, and call on me. As to Mr. Westbrook, I know he's not a marrying man—his aunt told me so—besides which he has no money, so I never encouraged him, you know, my dear, beyond a

certain point. He was civil and useful, and so forth." (If Westbrook could only have heard her!) "And provided he don't insist on playing his trumpet, I think he'll be a great acquisition to my little party. He and Mrs. Quintus Smith will suit, I know—moving quite in the same set. So even if you don't come, it doesn't signify. For really, between you and me, my dear, his manner to me was almost *more* than cordial—what you call *marked.* He even inquired where I went to church, and I fully expect to see him there next Sunday. Indeed, I remember a man, some years ago, at Harrowgate, who went regularly to church, and sat in front of me, and always *turned round* to kneel down, that he might look at me, which was very wrong, and calculated to disturb his thoughts, so I always frowned and shook my head, though I often felt touched by the poor man's piteous look of surprise when I did so. Where do you go to church, my dear?"

The works of Miss Pringle's tongue had run down, so she took breath upon a question. It needed but a simple answer—a mere touch—to set that admirable machinery in motion again.

"To the Temple in the afternoon, aunt. In the morning I generally read prayers with father."

"Poor dear man! I shouldn't think *he* could follow much, eh? Your papa is terribly broken,

my dear. It is impossible to make him understand a word I say, and he does nothing but talk about the darkness in a way that is really absurd. His memory is quite gone, too. I was speaking to him of Miss M'Claverty's elopement, which created such a scandal when we were at Bath together with your poor dear mother seven-and-thirty years ago, and I was telling him I had seen her daughter yesterday, which I thought would interest him; but I found he had forgotten all about the mother and the coachman, and all the interesting details, which occupied the public mind so much at the time."

"Father never cared about gossip."

"As to that, there are, of course, different degrees of intelligence, and all people are not gifted with equally inquiring minds. But like the man in the play, my dear, your father likes to sup full of horrors, eh? Any gossip of a frightful or appalling kind he is still alive to, I observe. Indeed, I never come here, but he asks me whether there have been any bad accidents—which is hardly Christianly, I think."

"If more Christians were like him, the world would be a better place than it is," said his daughter, firing up. "He is kindness itself, and would not hurt a fly. But the manly love of adventure, which any one can see he had as a young man,

makes him still delight in hearing of hair-breadth escapes, from which courage and presence of mind have extricated men. You ought to have known him better, Aunt Clo."

"My dear, I know that he was always an excellent man,—no one can say I ever said a word against him—only the infirmities of age *are* very trying, eh? and he certainly is, eh? terribly broken—there is no denying *that*. You couldn't keep the state of things from him, if it wasn't so (and it is next to impossible that it *can* continue). I'm sure it must be a great strain upon you, my dear, and if it goes on much longer—this constant watching and waiting on the poor man, and this habitual life of deception—you will be worn to a thread. You are as thin as possible now, and your complexion is horridly yellow. Do you ever use the milk of roses I gave you? I shouldn't have kept my complexion as I have under so many trying circumstances (fancy that horrid girl, Jane, giving me warning *again* yesterday) if it hadn't been for that valuable wash."

"Your anxiety about my health is quite unnecessary, aunt: I am perfectly well."

"So you say, my dear; but it's a very unnatural state of things. I only hope it won't go *on*;" and she rose and shook her petticoats for departure.

"I don't know what you mean by an 'unnatural state of things;' and as to its 'going on,' I hope everything will go on *exactly* as it is until Rupert's return. Good-bye, aunt."

So the old lady went her way, having succeeded in irritating her niece by more than one of her little speeches.

She sat down and thought what she should do if Westbrook found her out, and called. It would be very pleasant to see him again; to hear that most musical voice saying even common-place words; to meet those handsome eyes once more. She did not deny it. But no doubt it was much better as it was. Still she thought a good deal about him all that day. He had not forgotten her. That is always a strong claim in a woman's eyes. She wondered whether he ever bore in mind what she had said to him the last time they met—whether he was an improved man—whether Rupert would always think as badly of him as he now did. She certainly thought a great deal about him all that day.

Olivia, according to her promise, called on Mrs. Crosbie. The stern, iron-grey woman, she had seen only once before, was seated on a horsehair sofa, having a cup of chamomile tea, or some bitter drink in her hand, which she seemed to be deliberately sipping. There was neither book nor work

on the table before her: only a silver watch—almost a clock in dimensions—stood there, in its case, at such an angle relatively to its owner, that her eye fell readily on the dial. She was an uncomfortable-looking woman, and everything about her looked hard and unpromising. The extreme hollowness of her figure and spareness of petticoat, joined to the sharp lines of her face, produced the same impression on her visitor now that they had done on the day of Mrs. Crosbie's arrival.

She glanced to the other end of the room: Mrs. Elliston was not there; but there stood her open piano, her canary, a large bunch of violets, a few ragged-looking books, and some woman's work. The contrast between the two ends of the room was as complete as between the aunt and niece who dwelt there.

"Mrs. Elliston is out, ma'am," began Mrs. Crosbie, almost before her visitor had entered.

"My visit was to you, Mrs. Crosbie—by your niece's request," said Olivia, rather shyly. "But perhaps as you are not well, you had rather——"

"You will excuse my rising. I can't stand; but take a chair, ma'am. You're Miss Marston, I suppose?"

"I am; and being in the same house——"

"My niece came down and scraped acquaintance with you about some book or other she had

dropped? She told me so much; and I'm glad she should have made some respectable acquaintance. I inquired of Mrs. Flaherty all about you. Clara picks up a lot o' people at the theatre that I never allow to darken *my* doors. I won't have no actors nor actresses here. That *she* knows. Sit down, ma'am."

"I hope you are feeling better," hazarded Olivia, after a pause.

"No, Miss Marston, no better."

"The season is very trying just now—so much fog. You will be better as the spring comes on."

Mrs. Crosbie gulped her chamomile, and said—

"I'm old, Miss Marston, and old people must have ailments. I'm only troubled about one thing —I can't go about and look after that girl when I'm like this."

"Do you mean Mrs. Elliston?"

"Yes; for all she's a widow, she's as incapable of taking care of herself as a new-born babe. Some people never *do* learn no sense."

"She is very young."

"Twenty-two," responded Mrs. Crosbie; "and that's old enough to have sense, I suppose?"

"Has she been long a widow?"

"Three years. Her husband was a poor creature, I fancy—never kept her in no order, and left

her without a farthing when he died. That's the way with most of 'em."

"Was he an actor?"

"Yes; that and his pretty face took the girl. I never saw him. I was out in Canada with my husband when they married. I thought it a foolish business when my sister wrote to tell me —and *she* was never troubled with too much sense, but it was no business of mine."

"They must have been married a very short time?"

"Better than two years. I came home when Crosbie died (my sister was dead too), and found this girl, her only child, a widow, without a penny. So I took her to live with me."

"That was very kind."

"No it wasn't, ma'am. It was my dooty; no more. But after a few months, as I wasn't rich enough to keep her, having nothing but my pension as Crosbie's widow, she went back to her singing, and to the stage. I suppose I needn't hardly say, it ain't what *I* like. The Rev. Mr. Sparshott is always at me about it. I make her listen to two or three prayers from *The Futility of Good Works* every day. Do you know that precious book, ma'am? Upwards of sixty thousand in circulation—price one and sixpence. Happy to [illegible] you with a copy. Well, I can't do no

more for Clara than show her the danger of her paths."

"Are you afraid, then, of her trusting too much to her own good works?" asked Olivia—for this seemed the obvious deduction.

"It would be hard to say what they *was*," returned Mrs. Crosbie. "No, ma'am, but she's awful vain, and the Lord has given her a voice, and, except a pretty face, very little besides. However, the girl must make her living. *I* can't do no more than I do. *I* can't support her entirely."

"Of course: and there is no harm in singing, Mrs. Crosbie?"

"I don't think much of it *myself*," replied that lady, gloomily. "I've mostly found singing and bad company go together. And the worst of it is, I can't be always with Clara, though a widow of twenty-two *ought* to be able to take care of herself—there's no gainsaying *that*. But she takes as much looking after as a child—always running up bills, and forestalling her week's salary, and never knowing what she's got. There isn't a day that I shouldn't like to give her a good shaking for some stoopid thing she's done. She is enough to provoke a saint, she is. Sometimes I half make up my mind to leave her, and let her get on as well as she can alone."

"Oh, Mrs. Crosbie, I'm sure you'll never do

that! You'll never desert your niece, however tiresome and provoking she is. The more helpless or imprudent, the more she wants you, and you are too kind, I am sure, to give her up."

"No, I ain't a bit kind, Miss Marston. If I does it, it's because it's my dooty. I saw my dooty plain to Crosbie, and I did it for five-and-thirty year, though he wasn't a good husband to me—so I'm accustomed to worriting and bother, and to do my dooty, however nasty it may be. But Clara *does* try me, there's no denying that."

It struck Olivia that the widow's duty to her husband might be better fulfilled by observing a silence as to his demerits: she only said, however,

"Your niece is very attractive, and is sure to marry again, and then you will be relieved from this responsibility."

"That's just one of the things I'm most afraid of! She'll accept the first good-looking man who makes love to her, without ever thinking whether he can support her, or whether *she* won't have to support *him*. If he should have a tenor voice into the bargain, then it's all up with her. She's a fool."

Olivia could not help laughing: but Mrs. Crosbie continued, without the spark of a smile,

"Take my advice, young lady. Keep unmarried. When a woman is fortunate enough to become a

widow, it is the height of madness for her ever to dream of taking another husband."

Surely, thought Olivia, no two women were ever less fit to live together than this aunt and niece. How much better Aunt Clo would suit Mrs. Elliston as a companion. What a pity, the lively, frivolous, dressy old lady could not change places with this grim Mrs. Crosbie!

As this idea crossed her mind, the young widow herself was heard running up-stairs, and came bounding into the room, with the demeanour of a school-girl of fourteen rather than that of a widow of three years' standing.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LOST CLOCK.

Her cheeks were glowing from a rapid walk: her eyes were greener and more sparkling than ever. Her dress being "kilted" from the mud, over the brightest of striped petticoats, showed a tidy little foot and a neat ankle. She had a large roll of music in her hand.

"Oh! you dear, kind creature!" she exclaimed, running up to Olivia. "How good of you to come and see Aunt Crosbie, while I was at my horrid rehearsal, screaming my poor lungs out, and making myself such a fright as never was, what with the dust, *and* the exertion of going all round the stage upon my knees after that stupid little tenor, I don't know how many times!"

She ran to the looking-glass, and examined her-

self, smoothing her hair, which was ever so little ruffled, before she brought a chair to Olivia's side.

"That's a new muff, Clara!" exclaimed Mrs. Crosbie. "Pray where did you get *that?* Another extravagance, I suppose!"

"Well, I don't remember exactly what it cost, but I know it was very cheap. And I couldn't act the *Sonnambula* with red fingers, could I, Miss Marston? My hands were so cold as I walked along, that I felt it was quite a duty I owed to society to warm them. By-the-by, I've got *such* a lovely new song, the conductor of the orchestra has written for me. Would you like to hear it?"

"Surely you must be tired now? Some other time."

"You'll not have a bit of voice to-night, if you begin screaming again," said Mrs. Crosbie. "Do try and see if you can't sit still for five minutes. There was a man came to be paid for some flowers while you were out. *I* wasn't going to pay him. Such nonsense! What's the good of flowers, I should like to know?"

"Cari fiori," began Mrs. Elliston, warbling the pathetic air from the *Sonnambula*, as though that were a sufficient answer to her aunt's question; then, stopping short, after a bar or two, "Only

I've got to sing it in horrid English," she said, with a great sigh. "Listen, how bad it sounds."

She was an obstinate little woman, this widow Elliston, certainly. She ran to the piano, untied her bonnet-strings, and began. Perhaps she was determined that her new acquaintance should feel at once the influence of her strongest attraction. At all events she meant to sing: and she sang.

It was one of those lovely English voices, a fresh, full, clear soprano, unsurpassed in any country. It is true that half of it was lost in its passage through the throat, and some portion of the remainder behind the half-closed teeth. This is but saying that such cultivation as it had received had not been Italian. There was great natural facility; every roulade was as clear and true as possible; and there was something more than this, which no teaching can give, and without which all music falls dead on the ear. The soul of the little lady burnt passionately up through her song; she seemed to become ennobled as she sang; of a larger and deeper nature; such was the intensity of expression she threw into the music.

Olivia was amazed. Was this the same person she had been disposed to regard as a pretty garrulous little doll? In what depths lay hidden all these tender and stormy passions? Miss Marston had heard too much music, from her childhood (in Italy

and Spain) upwards, not to perceive that the singer lacked almost everything save what Nature had given her. But what was it all compared with that?

"You are made to be a great artist," she said, leaning over the piano, upon her elbows, and looking into Mrs. Elliston's flushed face, as she finished, and threw herself back in her chair. "You only want to study. You have been given a wonderful voice, and what is rarer still, a power of passionate expression. You must feel every note of that, to sing it as you do. It depends on yourself how much, or how little, you make of these great gifts."

This was not the sort of recognition of her talents to which Mrs. Elliston was accustomed. A compliment, prospectively less lofty, actually and unconditionally more positive, would have pleased her better, it is to be feared. A daily surfeit of flattery is unwholesome feeding. She tossed her gold hair back with ever so little a pout, and her small bright eyes flashed as she said:

"I was a pupil of the Royal Academy for more than a year, and then I learnt of Prodgetti and of Scrogini before I——"

"Prodgers and Scroggs," said her aunt. "No more Italian than you are."

"Well, I always used to sing in Italian with them, and that's what they call themselves; and I don't know why you should try and make out that I've not had the best instruction, Aunt Crosbie, when you know I've still got to pay Scrogini ever so much for the next year of my engagement, and —and——"

She looked very excited, and as if she were about to cry.

"You are so very young," said Olivia, gently. "You can't expect to be perfect until you have had more experience. Rome was not built in a day. If you go on studying, we shall have you singing at the Italian Opera I dare say, instead of these small theatres and saloons."

"They all tell me that song is perfect," she said, naïvely.

("What a fool you are to believe them!" muttered Mrs. Crosbie.)

"I know what it is! It is because I'm not on the stage. In the theatre I'm quite different. I can't sing here. I never could in a low stuffy room. You must come and hear me at the theatre. I'm in white, you know, with all my hair down my back, and they say I look very well."

"I have no doubt you do. I must be content, however, to see and hear you here, for there is no chance of my doing so in the theatre."

Mrs. Elliston's simple vanity did not disgust Olivia as much as a more subtle essence of the same quality might have done. It was still the child—a spoiled child if you will—whose *naïf* self-satisfaction disarmed severity.

"I am very fond of it," she went on; "it excites me so. When I get a passionate burst like 'grace, grace,' in 'Robert, toi que j'aime,' I feel all the blood through my veins. Only I've such a horrid little tenor to sing with—scarcely any hair on his head, and fat hands, without any muscle! It is impossible to fancy one's self in love with him: and that destroys a great deal, you know."

"What does it signify what the man's like?" cried Mrs. Crosbie. "You've got to sing to him, and he has got to sing to you, for a couple of hours, and if he has not got a hair left on his head, and is as fat as a pig, what does that matter to you, pray?"

Mrs. Elliston looked at Olivia, and shrugged her shoulders, as who should say, "You see what it is to live with a person who has not a grain of sentiment or refinement. There is no use in answering her"—and so she was silent.

"You speak Italian?" asked Olivia.

"No, but I sing it. Oh! if I could only sing at the Italian Opera—how I should like that!"

"Still," objected Olivia, "it is essential to

understand the language in which you sing. You can't give proper expression otherwise."

"Oh, I can make out enough for that, you know. Of course if I had the opportunity I should like to learn. I know I've a good pronunciation."

"Would you like to read some Italian with me? I think I might be of use to you."

"Oh, how kind! That I should. Every day, for an hour? And not *here?*" she added, lowering her voice. "I may come down to you, mayn't I?"

Thus a daily intercourse between Olivia and her new acquaintance was established. It was difficult to believe that these two women should ever become intimate; yet intimacy of a certain kind very quickly ensued. It was, in fact, so eagerly sought by Mrs. Elliston, that it would have been difficult for Olivia, having once opened the door, to keep it resolutely ajar. If it be true that in love "il y a toujours l'un qui baise et l'un qui tend la joue," it is at least equally so in friendship. Rarely, if ever, are the hands stretched out simultaneously; and, without very good cause for avoidance, it is only an unsympathetic nature that allows the outstretched hand to drop untouched.

In spite of her vanity, wilfulness, and other little similar defects; in spite of the somewhat disagreeable circumstance which led to Olivia's first ac-

quaintance with her, Mrs. Elliston continued to interest Miss Marston, and to induce her to make great allowances for her many shortcomings. "I have been knocked about the world like a foot-ball," she used to say. "I have never known a mother's care—never had any one to teach me anything, except music at the Royal Academy. All I know I have taught myself; and at seventeen I was told to marry my husband, whom I didn't care twopence about, and who didn't know what love was;—a cold——"

"Please don't say anything about your late husband. It pains me to hear you talk like that," interrupted Olivia, quickly.

The widow's introduction to Mr. Marston was very simply effected; and it was a circumstance that tended to facilitate the constant visits of this "neighbour" (as she was called) that the blind man took an uncommon fancy to her. She brought him books; she talked to him, and condoled with him upon the weather—the degeneracy in lamp-oil —the scandalous quality of fuel in the present day. He liked her blithe young voice; and Olivia was sensible of her kindness to the old man. But, indeed, she learnt that there was a great deal of kindness, and thoughtfulness too, in the apparently giddy widow. Olivia happened once to name a poor family in the neighbourhood whom

she used to visit constantly. It was one of the few out-of-door subjects of interest she possessed. The mother was bedridden; the father was a hard-working artisan, and there were six helpless children. Olivia taught the eldest of these children to sew; and any little shreds of work, or scraps from dinner that she could save, were carried to these poor people. Mrs. Elliston begged the next time to be allowed to go with her; and after that scarce a day passed without her bringing down to Olivia something—a slice of seed-cake, a couple of oranges, odds and ends of her wardrobe—for the sick woman or her children. Was all this from a desire to ingratiate herself with Miss Marston? Partly, perhaps; but let us give her the advantage of the doubt. It was pleasant to Mrs. Elliston to do kind or charitable actions—pleasanter, indeed, than to do strictly just ones.

Nearly three weeks passed. Almost every day Olivia found some hour, early or late, when she and Mrs. Elliston were both free, and could read *Le Notte Romane* or *Silvio Pellico* in the furthest corner of the sitting-room down-stairs, while Mr. Marston dozed by the fire undisturbed by the low hum of voices. Mrs. Elliston was no tedious pupil. Quick and clever in all she set her mind to master, the progress she made from day to day astonished Olivia, and encouraged her to continue

the kind task she had begun. The little lady was sometimes volatile, often tired, and once or twice tiresome; but she never forgot anything that Olivia told her: her ear was as keenly sensitive to accent as a child's, and her love of approbation stimulated her to imitate what she heard. They were very pleasant lessons to Olivia. The feeling, alone, that she was of use—that into her singularly isolated life, with its narrow round of daily duty, another interest, and possible good, had been brought—would have reconciled her to a less attractive pupil.

It was notable that as Mrs. Elliston grew intimate with Olivia, she shrank more and more from talking of the past. Sometimes she made a disparaging allusion to her late husband, like the one I have quoted, which Olivia always checked. But of the mystery which surrounded that letter she never spoke again. The confidence which a very little encouragement would have induced her in the first interview to give, there was no longer a disposition to offer. The impulse of the moment had been to tell all to the woman in whose power she believed herself to be. I think she hesitated for a long time to credit that Olivia had *not* read the letter: it was unlike anything in her experience. But as she learnt better that open and upright nature, and honestly clung to it, I do

believe, as to one of the few good things with which she had ever come into close contact, so she desired more and more to guard a strict silence as to all concerning her past.

Olivia, on the other hand, often pondered over the mystery of the letter, and wondered what the dark passage in this little singer's life could be. Though she discouraged her talking of her husband in the contemptuous terms Mrs. Elliston used, Olivia would not have repelled her new friend's confidence on the subject of the letter, had it now been offered. But it never was.

One day there came a knock at the door.

It was a gentle, deprecatory knock, which had to be repeated before it cut short the thread of Italian in Mrs. Elliston's mouth.

Olivia rose and went to the door. A dark, picturesque, somewhat evil-looking man, in the conical hat of the Abruzzi, stood there, with a fawning smile, and sharp, vigilant black eyes, that glanced quickly round the room, even while he spoke to her.

"Scusa, Signorina—cerco il Signor Ton—Ton—Tonson——", and he went on more volubly to explain that, overhearing his beloved "lingua" being read as he passed the door, he had made bold to knock, and interrupt the young ladies.

Signor Thompson, the painter, lived on the first

floor. The information was concisely given, and the man—a model, of course—with a lingering look at the room and its occupants turned away.

Olivia explained to her companion what the man had said.

"Why," exclaimed that astute little person, "should he knock at this door to ask something he knows quite well? I am sure I saw that man coming out of Mr. Thompson's room one day, a fortnight ago."

"Indeed!" said Olivia. "Then it must have been the seduction of your Italian that roused his curiosity to see what we were like in here. I wonder what Mr. Thompson is painting. The man hasn't a good face."

"I peeped in one day: the door was ajar——"

"My dear Mrs. Elliston!"

"I couldn't resist it. He had his back to me—had just come in. I saw a great canvas with some historical subject on it, and I think this man's head was just sketched in. He is a great bear, that Mr. Thompson."

"Why?"

"If I happen to drop anything on the stairs, he picks it up, bows in a glum away, and scarcely looks at me when I thank him, but stalks on. I wonder what he thinks himself!"

"What he thinks *you* is more to the purpose,"

said Olivia, quickly; "if you are in the habit of dropping things——"

She stopped abruptly, for the recollection of the letter flashed upon her. She had not meant to allude to it. She had in her mind the transparent coquetry of what she supposed to be the little widow's conduct, in dropping things purposely.

Mrs. Elliston did not wince. Neither did she seem to observe Olivia's sudden pause; but she changed the subject adroitly, nevertheless.

Three days later a very beautiful little clock which had belonged to Olivia's mother, and which Mr. Marston had the habit of *feeling*, whenever he stood near the chimney-piece, was stolen. The robbery must have been accomplished in the dusk, during the very few minutes that Mr. Marston was left alone. Olivia had gone to her room; Fritz was called into the kitchen, on some culinary consultation with Mrs. Flaherty. The thief, adroitly watching his opportunity, it would seem, had quietly opened the door, and without waking the blind man in his arm-chair by the fire, had walked off with the most valuable thing he could lay hands on.

The loss was discovered within a quarter of an hour of the robbery. Olivia was greatly distressed. She knew how highly her father valued this clock, and how he would miss it. Of the little that had

been saved from the wreck of their fortunes, this had been the first thing to be laid aside. He was not so deaf but that he could still hear it strike the quarters, and no other time was ever right for him but what this particular clock told. She never saw him go near the fire without his passing a hand over the case. It was something more than an inanimate object; it was a constant and a speaking companion to the blind man, sacred as having belonged to *her*, and bound up with endless memories of the past, that were hidden away from every mortal eye.

Olivia had a rapid consultation with Fritz, and to them was quickly joined Mrs. Flaherty. Who could it be? How could he or she have got into the house? The police? Yes, but first search the house. Might not the thief be concealed here still?

Rumour, wearing the shape of the maid of all work, flew up three pair of stairs, and bounced into Mrs. Crosbie's room with the intelligence.

Down rushes Mrs. Elliston, gushing over with sympathy, but more acute, in spite of her infantile garrulity, than any of them:

"The shaggy black man, Miss Marston! the model! The man who made you open the door!"

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. THOMPSON.

Mr. Thompson had been gone some time. His door was locked. Where to find him? How to learn the address of that ill-looking model who certainly had been seen to enter the house—the maid now remembered that she had let him in—early in the afternoon? The police were communicated with; they came and examined the premises, and listened to a statement of the case. The thief—supposing him to be the man in question—had no doubt concealed himself under the stairs, after leaving Mr. Thompson, and watched his opportunity to enter the Marstons' rooms unperceived. Again the question, where was this Mr. Thompson? was asked with some impatience by the police. It seemed scarcely credible that Mrs.

Flaherty did not know where to find him; and when she further stated that his visits were quite uncertain, and that very probably he might not come to his lodging at all to-morrow, the chief policeman, by his manner, seemed really to suspect that this strange lodger himself might be implicated in the robbery. At all events, the only clue to the discovery of the Italian model was wanting; for the present nothing could be done but to institute an inquiry after such a looking man, and to send round to all the pawnbrokers, warning them to give information if the missing property reached their hands.

The evening was a mild one; yet Olivia made up a fire enough to roast an ox. Even Mr. Marston, who was generally so chilly, felt oppressed by it, and her end, for the moment, was answered. He drew his chair rather further from the chimney-piece, and did not once get up to raise his coat-tails, and warm his back. The evil hour might be only deferred, but at least the old man would sleep to-night, without the agitation which the discovery of his loss would have caused. She herself passed an anxious evening and a restless night. If she could only keep the knowledge of this from him until some clue to the missing clock was traced!

She was up by daybreak—up and watching at the window, the baker, the milk-woman, the post-

man, the few stragglers, even to a vagrant dog, who came along the sloppy pavement at that early hour looking wistfully down all the area railings in search of a bone. No policeman, no Mr. Thompson, and the breakfast hour stealthily creeping on.

She went down-stairs. She sat sick at heart by the window. Fritz came in; he had been already with the police that morning. No clue to the suspected man; no tidings of the clock. Olivia sent her breakfast away untouched. She dared not alarm her father by going into his room; he hated anything unusual. As the clock struck ten he came in, leaning on Fritz's arm.

"Very foggy; very dark. Will you be good enough to write my journal, Olivia?"

"Yes, father."

"Does the fog get into your head, eh? Make you feel stupid? forget everything?" He is feeling the mantelpiece as he speaks.

Olivia bites her lip hard; the moment, she knows, has come.

"Where—where is the clock?"

He turned his sightless eyes towards her as he spoke, while his trembling hand still fumbled at the chimney-shelf.

She had found it quite impossible beforehand to frame any words wherewith to break the loss to him. The Father of Lies now urged her strongly

to say that the clock was gone to be cleaned; but she resisted the temptation. With the courage of desperation, she blurted out at last—

"Some one has taken it; but we shall get it back, papa, to-day, I hope. We know—we are nearly sure who it is, and——"

"Taken—*taken!*" he almost shouted. "What do you mean, child? My clock stolen? What are you talking about, eh? Got into the house! Who did it?—who? Oh, my God! *Her* clock—*her* clock!"

He became inarticulate with agitation. Fritz almost forced his master down into his chair, and Olivia knelt at his feet taking his hand in hers, and pouring out such soothing words as her heart prompted her at the moment to speak. But the old man's excitement rendered him impatient of any caress. He pushed away her hand and kept plucking at the arm of the chair, while he moaned and muttered, "Her clock—robbed—stolen—the villain—who is he? How did he get into the house? Ain't there bars to the windows? Do you see that the chain is put up at night? *Her* clock! Haven't you a house-dog? And the plate—have you seen that all the plate is safe? Terrible—terrible! *Her* clock; the only clock in the house that went properly. Cost forty-five guineas at Geneva in the year '30, and never lost a minute

in the year. *Her* clock, too—ta—ta—ta! What are we to do now, eh? Send for the police? Let 'em search the coal-cellar and every hole and corner, Olivia. Offer 'em a—a—well—a handsome reward, do you hear? I must have the clock back, I must."

Olivia caught sight of a head she recognised passing the window at that moment. She ran into the passage as Mr. Thompson opened the hall-door with his latch-key and entered.

"Sir," said Olivia impetuously, "we have been robbed; robbed of a clock which is of great value to my father, and we have every reason to think that a model of yours, a tall, dark Italian, is the person who has taken it. Can you give us his address?" Her cheek was flushed with excitement; her eyes looked full into the painter's face as she spoke. No wonder he seemed taken aback by the unexpectedness and the manner of the assault.

"By all means," at last he replied, slowly. "But may I ask your reasons for suspecting this man, Miss Marston? He is a great scamp, I dare say, and not unlikely to be the culprit. I shall do all in my power to find him, but it is better I should know what ground you have for suspecting the fellow."

"Firstly, that he knocked at our door some

days ago under the pretence of asking for you, though, it appears, he has been constantly in your rooms. I observed that he looked round ours curiously, and from where he stood he could see the clock. Then, it seems, he came to you early yesterday afternoon, but the maid says that she heard the street-door shut gently towards dusk, and, looking out, she is nearly sure she saw this man walking away."

"Humph. This is somewhat of my affair, Miss Marston. I consider myself responsible that—that—no pains is spared to get back your property, and I have little doubt of succeeding. He certainly left me while it was yet full daylight. Be good enough to describe this clock minutely; the maker, and number too, if you can."

"The maker was Grohe. I am not aware that there was any number on it, but my mother's initials, L. O. M., with the date, July, 1830, were engraved on the back." She then described the size and appearance of the case generally, which was similar to that of thousands still fabricated yearly. Mr. Thompson at once saw that, except for the initials, it would be impossible to identify this clock from any other such by the same maker.

"My father is very much excited about this loss," said Olivia. "It would be a comfort, per-

haps, if you would speak to him for a moment, Mr. Thompson, and tell him you think the clock will be recovered."

He followed her into the parlour, where Fritz was assuring his master energetically that it was impossible the clock *could* be stolen—"voyons, m'sieu, c't juste imbossible."

"Il ne faut pas congtredire la raison, Fritz. Ong me l'a volé," repeated the old gentleman angrily.

"Here is Mr. Thompson, papa," began Olivia.

"And who is Mr. Thompson, eh? What has he got to do with my clock, Olivia? Is this a moment for visits, when my clock is stolen? What are all the Mr. Thompsons in the world——"

"Stay, my good sir. I'm not the man who stole your clock, but I am the next thing to it; I brought in the man who probably did, and I shall not rest until I find him, and your clock too. Make your mind easy."

Olivia saw herself now in a fresh dilemma. How to explain to her father this Mr. Thompson's presence and business at all in the house? She had forgotten that. The blind man looked bewildered, but his angry excitement had now an object to vent itself upon. He took up his visitor's words:

"It's easy to say 'easy,' sir. God bless my

soul! Brought a man into the house. And by what right, sir? what do you mean? Introducing a set of ragamuffins to cut people's throats and—and steal clocks in this way? Pray who are you, and by what right——"

Olivia's eyes had already implored Mr. Thompson's forbearance, and half explained the truth to him. The kindly, pitying look in the painter's eyes, as he bent them on the blind man, reassured his daughter. She now interrupted her father, apprehensive of what he might say next.

"Mr. Thompson has a room in this house, father. The person we suspect is a model he has been painting. I will explain it all to you afterwards."

But the old man's mind had already wandered back to its original grievance.

"Robbed. *Her* clock stolen; terrible—terrible! What am I to do, eh? It all comes of keeping the room so dark; scarcely feel the way to one's mouth. The confounded rascal must have taken it under my very nose. Where are the police? What are the police about, that they let thieves escape in this way?"

"The police are on the man's traces," said Mr. Thompson, "and before the evening we shall have both him and the clock; you may depend upon that, sir."

Mr. Marston listened like one in a dream. He had already forgotten who the speaker was; yet had a dim recollection that he had been told, and so leant back in his chair, muttering and moaning to himself, while Mr. Thompson left the room, followed by Olivia.

"You will forgive him, sir, I am sure," she said, "when I explain to you that he is quite blind, though he believes, or tries to make us believe, that he still sees. And he had paralysis just before his——before we came here, so we have never told him that this is a lodging. He can ill stand any shock now. That is why I am so anxious about this clock. I must explain your presence in this house as best I can to him, and you will come and tell us the result of your inquiries as soon as possible, won't you?"

"A quarter to eleven," he replied, looking at his watch. "I will send to you, or be here again, at two. And by that time you shall know what chance we have of success. Give your father something to make him sleep during the day, and before night——"

He left the sentence unfinished, for his hand was upon the street-door as he spoke, and he passed out quickly, closing it behind him.

"That should be an honest girl; or am I again deceived, and is she like the rest of them?" muttered the painter, as he hurried along. "It *looks*

a crystal nature, only that I have been taught, by bitter experience, to mistrust my discrimination in women. But what a head! I should like to paint it. The expression is even finer than I thought, until to-day, though I have watched her often, these months past, and have felt curious as to the girl herself. Yet, true to my plan of life, I avoided trying to find the answer to this riddle myself. Fate wills it that we are to become acquainted. So be it. We shall see if, in the long run, she prove to be all she looks. She can have no motive for playing a part to *me*—a poor painter, a middle-aged misanthrope;" and he smiled, more in sadness than bitterness, as the thought crossed his mind.

On the other hand, the painter's promptitude and decision in action had greatly reassured Olivia. His accent and way of speaking showed her at once that she had not been mistaken, that he was a man of education, and that, whatever the accidents of his worldly position, he was, in the true sense of the word, a gentleman. She was glad now that she had spoken to him herself, instead of sending a message by Fritz. There was something so kind in his manner, that she felt at her ease—almost on friendly terms—with him at once. So quickly, in those few minutes, had the barrier of five months been swept away!

In the mean time, this is what the painter did.

Having told the police all he knew touching the Italian, he hurried on to scores of models, organ-grinders, and savoyards, living in the purlieus of Saffron-hill. The information gained here, after some difficulty, was unsatisfactory enough. The man in question was supposed to have gone to Paris in company with a band of *pifferari*. Nothing could be heard of the clock. It had not been seen by any of his companions: it almost certainly had not been disposed of before he left. Except the fact of the man's decamping, there was no circumstance elicited tending to throw the least additional suspicion on the model. After nearly two hours of fruitless inquiry, Mr. Thompson left the matter in the hands of the police, threw himself into a hansom, and told the man to drive him to Wigmore-street. At Grone's door he got out.

There was a customer in the shop: he waited till this person was gone, then he asked to speak to the principal or foreman of the establishment.

"In the year 1830 a clock was bought from your house in *Geneva*," he began, and went on to describe the one stolen. "I am told it cost forty-five pounds. Do you know, or can you find out, the exact kind of clock you sold at that time for this price?"

"From what you say, sir, it must have been

similar to this. This has the same movement you describe, and the same sort of travelling-case."

The clock which was shown to Mr. Thompson corresponded in every particular with the description given by Olivia. One thing only was wanting.

"Engrave these letters for me here, on the back, do you see? Let it be done by six o'clock. I shall call for it at that hour, punctually. And get rid of that spic-and-span look: dull the ormolu a little." Then he went his way.

At two o'clock a line was brought to Olivia.

"You will have the clock this evening. Thief not turned up yet."

A sedative, surreptitiously administered, had made Mr. Marston sleep the greater part of the day. It was near seven o'clock when Mr. Thompson came, bringing the clock. Olivia ran up to him, with her face beaming.

"Where did you find it? Oh, how glad I am! And the wretched man, is he taken yet? I almost hope not. It is very weak, but I shall so hate any trial about it."

"There will be no trial, I think I may assure you. The man has certainly left England; that is clear. The clock I got, without any difficulty, from the shop where I found it."

"Well, it certainly has received no damage ex-

ternally during its escapade of twenty-four hours," said Olivia; "for it looks to me positively newer and brighter than it did yesterday."

"Probably cleaned and furbished up in the shop. Ah! your father is waking. Put the clock on his knee and let him feel it."

"Very dark," muttered Mr. Marston. "One feels quite confused; the fog gets into one's head, or something. Doesn't know where one is when one first wakes. Eh, what's this? The clock on my knee! What's the folly of putting it there? The mantel-shelf is the proper place for——Stay, I am losing my head, or I dreamt—I dreamt it was *stolen*, Olivia. Tell me if I was dreaming, child?"

"No, dear father, the clock *was* taken; you did not dream it; but you see it has come back quite safe, thanks to Mr. Thompson's kind exertions; and it has been cleaned, and looks so nice."

"Cleaned! It didn't want cleaning, and now there will be a bill to pay for that, and something for getting it back, I suppose. And have you caught the thief, sir? Make an example of him, sir. We'll prosecute him. I'll go into court myself. (What's that you're whispering, Olivia? —telling me to thank Mr. Johnson?) I wish I could see you better, sir, but the room is so confoundedly dark. I am greatly indebted to you for getting this clock back; but as I under-

stand that, owing to some odd arrangement, you have a room in my house, I hope you won't let any more of these foreign ruffians in—that's all. (He won't expect to be asked to dinner, will he?)"

The sentences in brackets were delivered in two very audible asides to Olivia, who knelt beside him, holding the clock on his knee. She looked up, with flushing cheeks, at their visitor, on whose lip was the faintest possible smile.

"You need have no apprehensions, Mr. Marston, from any more of my models. If I want one again, I will bring him into the house, and see him out of it. And as to this thief, we shall find him, sooner or later, and punish him, without your appearing in court; I have little doubt of that. He will be hanging about Rome, or Florence, or Paris, when I go there. That sort of vagabond never turns to a life of hard work in his mountains again."

"The ends of justice will hardly be answered by that—eh?" said the old man, with a quiet sarcasm. "And as to foreign police—*they're* no good."

"Then I shall be my own policeman (if I catch him)," said the painter, smiling. "As I was once, at Toledo."

"Eh? How was that? At Toledo? God

ashamed to punish the abject brute any more."

"Ah! very interesting, Mr. Johnson. Satisfactory, that. Terrible thing, a dishonest servant—terrible! Cut your throat before you know where you are—like Lord What's-his-name? No security when you lie down at night! Lucky thing for you, sir, that you left Toledo at once. I know those Spanish and Italian fellows—you'd have had a stiletto in you, as sure as your name is Johnson."

"Thompson, father."

"Very well, Thompson, then. And so you've been a great traveller, sir?—painting as you go along, I suppose; a knapsack on your back—eh? Well, *I* once travelled like that, when I was five-and-twenty. Then afterwards, when I had a family, we went about in a coach; and fine work I had to make them grease the wheels, and oil the leathers, and clean it all properly at night. I've stood over them for hours; but there isn't a foreigner who knows anything about a carriage—or a horse either, for that matter."

"Quite right there, sir," said the painter, who began to understand the old gentleman, and found a good deal of quiet amusement in humouring him—"quite right. It requires to keep a sharp look-out in such cases."

"You may say *that*, indeed! Very unpleasant things happened—*very* unpleasant, several times. I found the linchpin out of one of the wheels

once, just as we were starting. Why, sir, we might all have been rolled into the Arno, and the coach atop of us; we couldn't have swum out. And once I found a fellow coiled up with the drag, underneath the carriage, smothered in dust, but smoking his pipe, and letting us pull him up-hill, as coolly! . . . He probably was a robber, who was waiting his opportunity to attack us; but I presented my loaded pistol at him, and he took to his heels across the woods in double-quick time."

He leant back in his chair; Olivia had not seen him so talkative, so like his old self, for months. He certainly was the better for a visitor who would fall into his vein, and tell him of personal experiences that aroused his peculiar turn of interest. Mr. Thompson sat there, very good-naturedly, as Olivia said to herself, for nearly half an hour, relating such anecdotes as his tact showed him were likely to be relished by the blind man. And the clock was forgotten. As he got up to go away, Olivia suddenly exclaimed:

"You must have paid to recover this clock, I am sure?"

"Nothing, Miss Marston."

"My father, being practical, thought of this. I confess I did not, till he suggested it. You will come and see him again, Mr. Thompson? It will be kind of you—now that the ice is broken, and

that the thought of a strange visitor will not startle him. Your stories have amused him so much, I know. He will talk about them all the evening. Thank you so much for all your trouble.'

The old man wished him good night quite cordially.

"Rather an amusing man, that Mr. Jackson," he said, when his visitor was gone. He never committed himself to extravagant praise of any thing or body. Yet he talked of little else till he went to bed; asking questions about him which Olivia was quite unable to answer, and commenting upon the stories he had heard.

As Olivia replaced the clock upon the mantelpiece, her eye was attracted by the inscription at the back.

"It is strange," she said to herself, "I have not looked at it for a long time; but my impression—my strong impression—was, that the letters were roman, small roman letters, and *this* writing is in running characters. I can't make it out. The case, too—it is very strange;" and she fell to pondering, without being able to arrive at any satisfactory solution of the difficulty.

...RACE OTHER.

...MANNER WAS COR-... I chat with ... Sometimes two or ... without his ... the whole, he ... there: and, ... Mr. Mar- ... left the ... look for ... day, ... where, after whole ... the sound of the painter's voice. It was a pleasant one, certainly, and his manner of recounting was good. He had

travelled much, and seen much of his fellow-men; that was clear. From whatever source he drew his daily supply of anecdote, whether from his own imagination or from old books (for he was evidently a great reader), the art of pouring it out, like beer, not flat and spiritless, but with a head on, was great. Olivia was as much delighted to listen as her father. How often, in after-years, she looked back to those hours, when a happiness was growing up silently and unobserved in her, day by day, and when, without a thought of the future, she let herself drift upon the sunny tranquil waters of the present, ignorant of whither they were bearing her!

Here is an extract from one of her letters to Rupert, in which, after telling him of the robbery, she went on to speak of Mr. Thompson:

"He is a very singular person. He gives me the impression of a life wasted by some great sorrow: I fancy he bears the stamp of it in his face. Not that he is sentimental or melancholy; on the contrary, he is at times very humorous, and his conversation with father is always amusing—only occasionally rather cynical, which I dislike. But he has strong and deep feelings, I am sure, under that grave, calm exterior; and in his satirical talk I often detect an under-current of passionate sadness. Father has taken an amusing

fancy to him, and, now that De Castro and Montalba are away, his visits are most pleasant and wholesome diversions for him, from the monotony of my very small talk. Of Mr. Thompson's past (or, indeed, present) history no one in this house knows anything. In spite of his old coat, he must be tolerably well off, from certain small indications, which a woman, of course, is sure to observe; and if painting be really his *profession*, he is certainly independent of it."

Not many evenings after the robbery, Mr. Thompson encountered Mrs. Elliston, for the first time, at the Marstons'. He did not look surprised, for he was a man who seldom showed what was passing within; but he listened to the little lady with a certain scrutiny, unmixed with the smallest pleasure or admiration. So, at least, it appeared to Olivia; and from an artistic point of view, at least, she had expected that Mr. Thompson must admire her pretty friend. The attention he paid Mrs. Elliston was that of a naturalist to the insect he wishes to dissect. He talked very much less when she was present; listened, and watched; and, like a skilful counsel, put an adroit question now and then, which "drew out" something he wanted. But Mrs. Elliston writhed under this process, for she was sharp enough to see what he was about; and she resented at once the obtuse-

ness to her charms and the cold analysis of her character.

"How you can stand that man sitting there and saying nothing, but smiling every now and then with those washed-out eyes of his, Miss Marston, I can't think! Such manners as he has, too, I never saw! I like artists in general so much, but this one really is too great a boor. It's very good of you to tolerate him—for your father's sake."

"There is no goodness in it, I assure you. For my own sake, I am extremely obliged to him for coming. I find his visits pleasant and amusing. Only when you come in, I think he likes hearing you talk better than talking himself."

"I am very much obliged to him; but I don't like a man who never says a word, but glares at one, and listens to all one says. He has one at such a disadvantage: and then he puts questions too; in fact, it is the only time he ever opens his lips. I wonder what he would do if I were to put questions to *him*."

"Probably, not answer them," laughed Olivia.

"Well, there are one or two that I *should* like to put to him, and if I meet him very often I think I shall. Is he married or single? to begin with. Then, how is it that no one knows where he lives?"

know he does. Don't listen to him, if he abuses me."

"Abuses you? Nonsense, Mrs. Elliston; he——"

"Please, call me Clara."

"Well, Clara, then; Mr. Thompson is a thorough gentleman. He would not think of abusing a lady, whom he has never met but in our drawing-room."

"Ah! that is just it. I don't know. I am not sure that he may *not* have met me before; and because I'm a poor singer, who am obliged to earn my bread, he may think fit to say all sorts of things about me. Men are so ungenerous."

"Not this one, I think," said Olivia. "But if I am to talk to you as a friend, let me say this. You fancy Mr. Thompson has conceived a prejudice against you? If what you said, the other day, be true, I am not surprised. You behave more like a giddy child than a staid widow, dropping your things on the stairs, singing at the top of your voice, peeping in at his room-door—in short, to speak plainly, trying to attract his attention by every sort of device. I believe you do it out of pure gaiety of heart; but it is excessively foolish, and calculated to give the very worst impression of you to any stranger. A man of Mr.

Thompson's age has possibly very little toleration for such frolics."

The tears came again into the little widow's eyes.

"I'm sure I don't care how little he tolerates them, provided he doesn't turn you against me. But you're right, dear, I know you are; and I'm a foolish little creature—only I really think Aunt Crosbie makes me worse by saying everything I do is wicked; and I'm sure, with the dull life I lead——"

"Dull? Why, you have all the excitement of the theatre. I consider your life very dissipated, on the contrary, though I'm afraid not a happy one. This feverish restlessness, I suppose, belongs to your career; but you can never have any time for reflection, Clara; and living in a perpetual whirl, no one can be happy, it seems to me. During the few quiet hours of the day you are occasionally at home, do you ever sit down and think seriously of this life, which is gliding away, like water through your fingers?"

Clara Elliston's head was turned aside. She shook it silently.

"I never think," she said, at last, and in so ered a voice that Olivia started. "If I did, I uld go mad. My only happiness in the past mingled with bitterness: I can only live in the ent."

"And the future? You are still very young: you have a long and probably a difficult life before you. Whatever is past, *is* past; whatever is to come you have the power of shaping, in some sense, for 'conduct is fate;' but by drowning thought, and living from excitement to excitement, you are preparing yourself ill to meet sorrows, and trials, and disappointments."

"I cannot help it. I am so constituted, that if I have not something to rouse and interest me, I am miserable. You don't know me; perhaps you will, some day. I am a wretched creature—full of faults and follies, dear; but I am to be pitied —I am, *indeed:* if you knew all, you would say so."

She cried; and then she dried her eyes; and five minutes afterwards she was mimicking her Aunt Crosbie, and laughing in that bewitching childish way of hers, which Olivia could seldom resist, though she often disapproved.

I think it probable that had Mr. Thompson shown himself the least attracted by Clara Elliston's pretty wiles, Olivia would have been less indulgent to her than she was. But she came to the conclusion, after watching them together upon three or four occasions, that the painter *was* hard upon the poor little widow. And, after that, she sought an opportunity of speaking to him about her. And this trait was very characteristic of

[redacted]

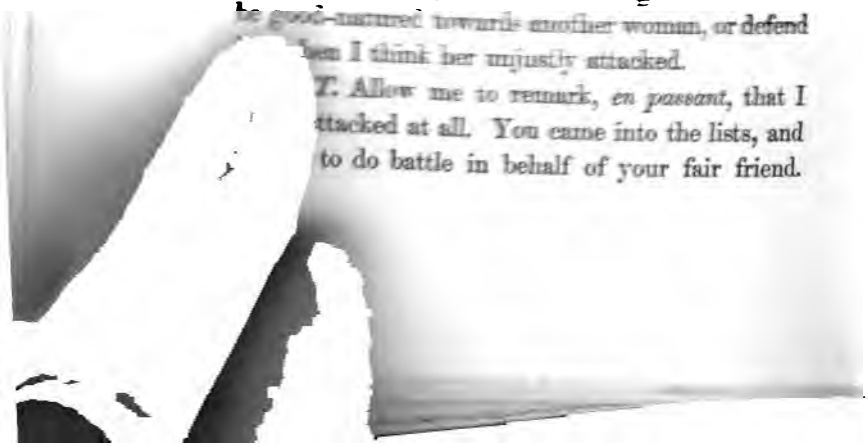
and giddy—so like a child. Why do you smile? I know her conduct is often foolish, perhaps even reprehensible; but she is of an excitable temperament, and then she has evidently never had much education—of course, I mean of the higher sort—and therefore great allowances are to be made for her.

Mr. T. Oh, if you go back to first causes, I have nothing to say, Miss Marston. No doubt you are right. Great allowances ought to be made, I think, for the man at the gallows, inasmuch as his early training was not what it might have been.

O. But there is real good in Mrs. Elliston, let me tell you, in spite of her little surface follies. I know one or two poor people about here, to whom she has been very kind. Then there is no end to her little thoughtful attentions to my father and to me. If she has had any flowers at the theatre, she is always sure to send me half; and the same with fruit, books, newspapers, that she thinks may amuse my father.

Mr. T. How does she get all these luxuries? Living in a garret, with that most repulsive old lady up-stairs, is it not somewhat strange that she should be so supplied?

O. She has not the least idea of the value of money, and is very extravagant. I often lecture her; but she always assures me that these things



…ttacked at all. You came into the lists, and
… to do battle in behalf of your fair friend.

As to my knowledge of your sex, this is what experience has taught me: that it is divided into two classes, the intensely virtuous, who have such a keen nose for vice that they smell it a mile off; and the utterly careless in such matters, who are too much absorbed in themselves and their own affairs (here he frowned) to think of attacking their neighbours—unless their neighbours interfere with *them*. These are not the women who would give up some hours every week to teaching one of their own sex, more especially if she were young and pretty, with every disposition to make the most of these advantages. You see, you put my calculations out: I can't class you under either head.

O. Are not all classifications mistakes? We vary as the leaves do on a tree. It is evident, however, that your ideas of women are based upon most unfortunate experiences, since you think they can be classed broadly under "the careless" and "the uncharitable." Owing to circumstances, I have been brought up more with men than women. Of the latter I know, indeed, very few; yet I know enough to belie your judgment.

Mr. T. You are right: my experience has been unfortunate, Miss Marston.

She felt sorry that she had said it; there was an expression in the painter's face she had never seen before. Perhaps he had an unhappy home? She

[illegible] how I be were married [illegible] I [illegible] he com-
[illegible]

[illegible] its experience
[illegible] makes him sceptical of
[illegible] [illegible] nearly love: and
[illegible] [illegible] woman generally is so
[illegible] [illegible] make him think ill of
[illegible] [illegible] have him otherwise. He
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] so young
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] and when he
[illegible]—

[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] that he
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] is sure to be
[illegible].

[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] He is so do-
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] He never could go
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] a solitary old age for
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] It is different for a
[illegible].

[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] my experience comes in.
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] in all human probability, be a
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] I am very, very glad of it. It
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible].

[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]—I thought you were
[illegible] [illegible].

[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] Miss Marston. It pleased a mer-
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] to make me a widower.

Olivia was somewhat shocked at the levity of the painter's tone, and the bitter smile that accompanied it. There followed a pause, which she broke at last.

O. And you have no children—no home ties?

Mr. T. None. My art is now wife, and child, and everything to me. She is but a fickle mistress, if you divide your affection between her and others. All artists should be single—all creators of any kind—unless the wife is content to occupy a secondary place.

O. (*ruminating*). Let us see—there is Shakespeare——

Mr. T. Shakespeare never wrote after he settled down at Stratford, and became a family man. Dante, Petrarch, take whom you will—musicians, painters, poets — they are either unmarried, or their married lives are miserable.

O. Clearly it is not the wives' fault, then. It is hard that our sex should be made responsible for this.

Mr. T. I do not hold them so. I say that the exercise of the imagination—and the larger and loftier that imagination is, the more self-absorbing—unfits men for married life. All the nourishment that should go to the heart goes to the brain. They are irritable, capricious, moody—seldom pleasant husbands for the fireside; often led by their fancy to seek for companionship beyond it.

There was another pause; Olivia scarcely knew what to say.

O. And every year you find your profession more engrossing? How long have you been an artist?

Mr. T. I have only worked seriously within the last five years. I always drew, but it was only when losses—circumstances, in short—made me retire from the world, that I found Nature was my best friend, and my brush and palette my most trustworthy servants. I never tire of Nature. Books sometimes bore me; pictures often; people almost always; Nature never. I go out upon Hampstead Heath, and I find her as beautiful in her garb there as I do upon the Campagna. I travel abroad, but what is it for? Not for the galleries; not for the ruins of antiquity: it is for the varying aspects of Nature. She alone never disappoints me, though Velasquez and Leonardo often do. She, I find, always repays me, whether I wander on the lonely summits of the Apennines or the sunny plains of Provence, Styria, Switzerland, Spain—she greets me everywhere. Do you remember what Wordsworth says?—

> . . . . that Nature never did betray
> The heart that loved her: 'tis her privilege,
> Through all the years of this our life, to lead
> From joy to joy: for she can so inform
> The mind that is within us, so impress

With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us.

Mr. Marston, who had been dozing, here started up, and called for Olivia.

The *tête-à-tête* was broken up for that evening.

CHAPTER XIX.

SKIRMISHING.

Miss Marston found herself pondering over the painter's words, and wondering what his past history was, more persistently that night than she would have cared to admit. He called in the next morning on his way up to his work.

"I went to see your friend last night. She hasn't a face for the stage: it is all too small—eyes and everything; but she acts with tremendous fire, and has wonderful lungs for such a little woman. She made startling plunges with her voice, and fished up a deep note, every now and then, Heaven knows where from! And then she went up like the last string of a fiddle—squeak, squeak, until the excruciating sound was lost in the cavities of the brain. It was a more extra-

ordinary than pleasing exercise. Lik
tumbler, one was painfully curious t
she would ever get her voice down
screwing it up so high into her head."

"What's that you're talking abou
that's got into your head?" inquired
leaning forward, with his hand up t
catch what he heard but imperfectly.
say you'd been watching a tumbler?
a very dangerous exercise, particularly
slippery weather. I remember seei
Seville once, in the streets. He had
—terrible: knocked out all his front

"Ah, sir, that was nothing to six b
I saw in the arena at Nismes, perf
umphal pyramid upon each other's
fundamental base of this erection slip
his foot—down they all came! T
went up with Roman noses, which
like pugs."

"You don't say so? Three R
Terrible, terrible, indeed!—ta—ta—
heard of many accidents in the s
You don't take the horses out this d
hope, Olivia?"

The painter looked at Miss Marst

"No, father, we never take the
and turning to Thompson, she add

voice, "Do you wonder very much at my constant power of dissimulation? It is so easy, poor darling! to deceive him, and it saves him such a world of misery! indeed, I don't think he would survive the shock. Nothing else could make me carry on this sham of being something we no longer are."

"I am not of those who will think less of your truthfulness on that account," he said, with a friendly smile.

"Do you sell your pictures very dear?—make much money by 'em?" asked Mr. Marston by-and-by, suddenly.

"I can't say that I do," replied the painter, with perfect good humour. "You see, my style is the great historic, which isn't very marketable in England."

"Bad investment, that. You'd better change your style, then. No family to support, I suppose—eh?"

"None, sir, thank Heaven."

"Ah! that's lucky; better be in a house of business, though. I shouldn't wonder if my son were a partner in Claxton's house, some day; getting on famously—that's the sort of art that pays best—those are the sort of *figures* that return a man interest for his time; *he draws* them to some purpose—eh, sir?" and the old gentleman was mightly pleased at his own joke.

"I should make but a poor man of business," replied Thompson; "but I have more than enough for all my wants, and, for the rest, I am very indifferent about money. You see, sir, I have no one to make, or to save for; and I have no sympathy with the man who 'heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them.'"

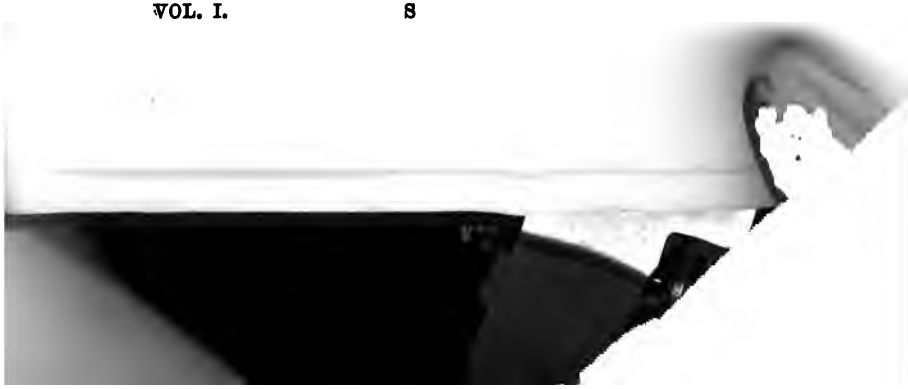
"Tut—tut—why, you're a young man still, eh? I don't see very clear, but so I imagine. You may marry yet, and have a family."

"You are mistaken, sir; I am hard upon forty; and led a married life of such supreme bliss for eighteen years that I am not likely to try and renew it."

Mr. Marston pondered on the sarcasm of the painter's words; his brow knit, his sightless eyes fixed on the wall opposite, and his lips parted, as was his wont when trying to solve some mental puzzle.

Olivia sat steadily stitching, without looking up. She wished he would say something more; she felt the most intense curiosity about his married life, but, somehow or other, she would not have shown this for the world.

The awkward silence was broken by Clara Elliston, who, with a preliminary knock, tripped into the room just then, kissed Olivia, bowed frigidly to Mr. Thompson, and went up to the



blind man, announcing her presence by putting her little hand in his, and wishing him "good morning."

O. We have been talking of you, Clara. Mr. Thompson went to see you in the "Sonnambula" last night, and says you acted with great spirit.

Mrs. E. (*smiling blandly*). Ah! yes. I think I astonished them in "Do not mingle," with some of the things I did. I was in good voice, and being carried away by my excitement, do you know, I invented all those last roulades on the spot.

Mr. T. Did you? I thought so.

Mrs. E. I was universally complimented, and had three bouquets thrown to me from *one* box—filled by officers of the Guards, who came all the way from the West-end to hear me. *Those* are the men who know what singing is—accustomed always to hear the best.

This was said with marked emphasis. She was too sharp not to see that the painter's admiration had been of a very limited character. But I am afraid he was impervious to the sneer. He looked at her complacently, and said,

"I am an old-fashioned man, and not worthy, I am afraid, of the new school of singing."

"Olivia," said Mrs. Elliston, without taking any further notice of Mr. Thompson, "you will

be glad to hear that I have at last got two pupils —Alderman Bloom's daughters. I went to see Mrs. Bloom yesterday, and she haggled about terms for a long time; but I wasn't going to take the two for less than seven and sixpence each, and at last she had to give in."

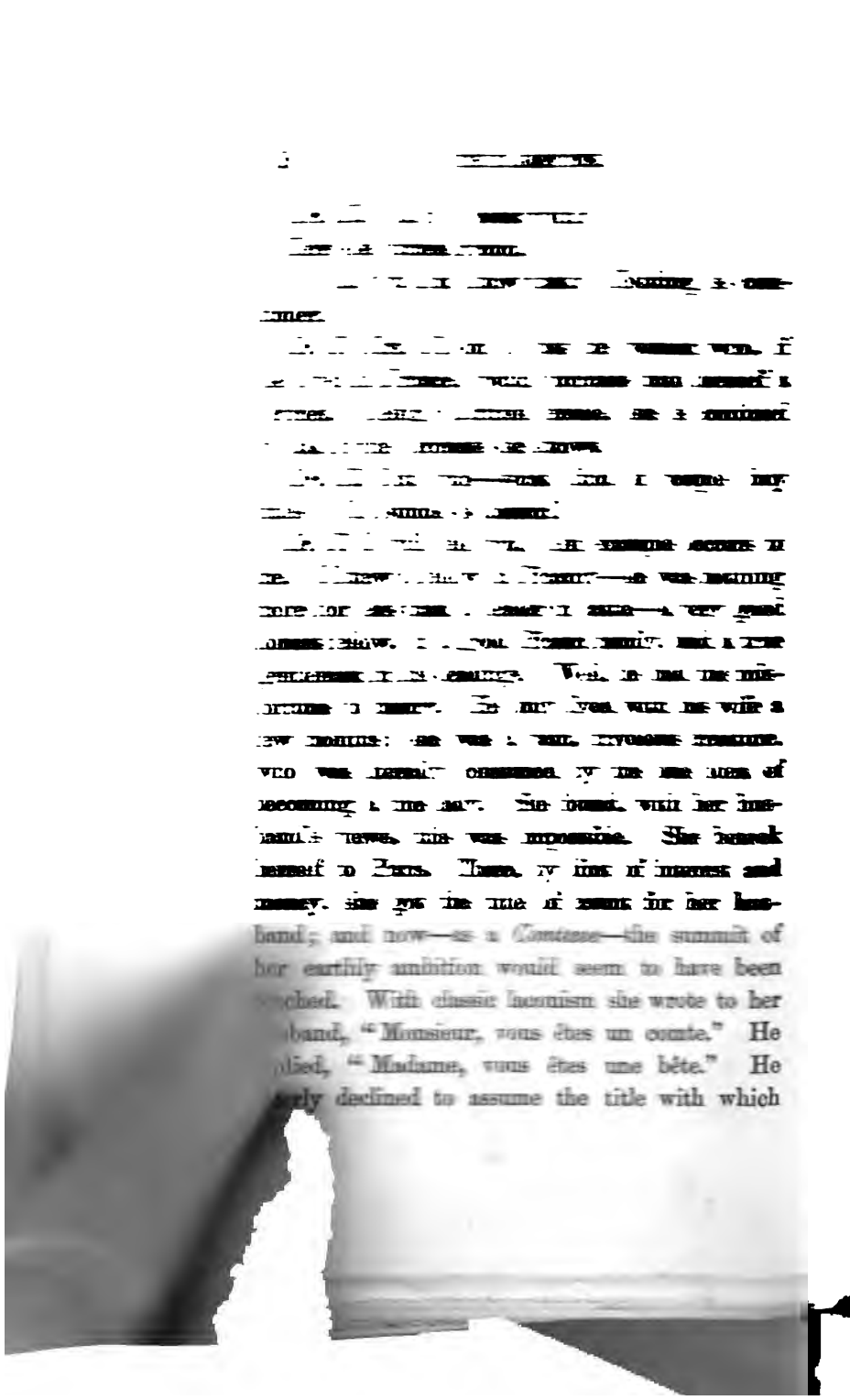
O. Oh! I am so glad.

Mr. T. And you thought Mrs. Elliston did not know the value of money, Miss Marston?

Mrs. E. (*still ignoring Mr. Thompson*). Mrs. Bloom is such a vulgar woman, my dear! The Alderman was Lord Mayor two or three years ago, and she has never recovered having been "My Lady" for twelve months. Fifty times, I suppose, in the course of my visit, she referred to that brief season of splendour. "When I was Lady Mayoress, I had *h*opportunities of 'earing the very best singing," she told me, and then she brought in a string of great names, to dazzle my poor weak brain.

O. That is a truly English kind of vulgarity: foreigners, I think, are seldom guilty of it.

Mr. T. Not in the same way, perhaps; but your mushroom barons and vicomtes make the most of their coronets. They plaster themselves over with them. And the value they attach to their wretched titles has no proportion to the money that they can be bought with.



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she had invested him, and, to her indignation and disgust, sent round cards to all their friends, on which was printed, "Monsieur ——, marchand de bestiaux."

Both ladies laughed, and Olivia said she supposed it had not profited the comtesse much in a worldly point of view; for certainly, in England, if such a thing were possible, it would only meet with ridicule.

Mr. T. The comtesse is now one of the great ladies of Paris—not of the imperial circle, if you please—nothing so *parvenu*, but of the Faubourg St. Germain. So much for perseverance and determination, even in the case of a gibbering fool like this woman. As to England, I think civilised human nature is pretty much the same all the world over. Customs may vary—the rind of the fruit, so to speak—but the core of snobbism is there. We do not purchase titles (though, by the way, may not the coronets bestowed on our rich bankers and large landed proprietors, without the smallest merit of their own, be said to be purchased, in a sense?), but if the system were ever introduced among us, you may be sure it would not be ridiculed, provided only it cost *enough*. Money sanctifies all in England—renders all possible: it is power.

Mrs. E. There is a horrid old Jew comes behind

the scenes at the theatre sometimes. He makes me sick; and yet I see all the women, and men too, crowding round and laughing at his nasty jokes, and paying him such compliments; and they write him such letters! All because he is rich. He wears diamond rings, as big as marbles, upon his dirty fingers; and they say that kings and princes invite him, and that all the great ladies go to his house. You may well say money is power. Heigho!

"That was an honest sigh, at all events," thought Mr. Thompson; "a sigh after the diamond rings, and the loaves and fishes, scattered broadcast by this wealthy Israelite." Olivia sighed too, but he interpreted her sigh differently. Mr. Marston, not hearing what was said, hazarded the novel observation that it was dark—very; and that he wondered whether the lamps were lit in the streets.

Mr. Thompson replied it *was* dark, and that the papers spoke of an earthquake at Athens.

Mr. M. God bless my soul! You don't say so? An earthquake! Shocking, terrible, indeed! Many people swallowed up? Are there any particulars?

Mr. T. None, sir, as yet. Here comes your servant to take you out for a walk.

Mr. M. A walk? Nonsense! Such a morning as this!

O. Yes, father—just a little turn. You will find it much warmer out than in.

Fritz. Il fait bi'n beau, m'sieu.

Mr. M. Nong; je n'irai pas. Il fait trop obscur.

Fritz. Je fous garantie, m'sieu, qu'il fait beau.

Mr. M. Fritz, il ne faut pas congtredire la raison. Ong va se perdre dans ce bouillard.

The battle, fought afresh every morning, lasted some few minutes, but ended, of course, in the defeat of the old gentleman, who was led off a prisoner, to take his exercise on the sunny strip of pavement outside.

As he shuffled out upon Fritz's arm, it struck the three who watched him—but most painfully of all his daughter—that his gait was feebler, and his body more shrunk and bent, than it had ever yet been.

Mr. Thompson wished Olivia good morning, and went up to his work. But his work, apparently, did not prosper. It was the head of a woman, in chalks, to which he applied himself, as soon as he had locked himself into his room, and had exchanged his coat for a painting-blouse, and had lit his pipe, and had brought this head from the corner of the room, where it had been reposing with its face to the wall. He had been at work upon it, without a model, all yesterday, and the day before, and for many days before that again,

and had not succeeded in satisfying himself at all. It was a profile, somewhat too sharp in outline, perhaps, but nobly modelled, the putting-on of the head and column-like grandeur of the throat reminding one of an Elgin marble. The pale lustrous eyes, under straight brows of unusual darkness, had given the painter much trouble; but he had caught their character sufficiently to leave no doubt on the mind of any one who had seen the original, for whom the sketch was intended. So this misogynist could paint women, and take pains with them, too. Apparently, it was the institution of matrimony, and not the sex, to which he had an aversion.

"I'm so glad that man's gone, dear," said Mrs. Elliston, throwing herself into an arm-chair. "I never feel at my ease when he is present. I didn't choose to say so before him, but that old Jew has been persecuting me so. I might be covered with his diamonds now, if I chose — the nasty old wretch!"

Olivia turned sharply round, and looked at Clara, with a flaming cheek.

"What do you mean? Surely I must have misunderstood you?"

"Dearest Olivia, is it my fault if I attract men so? I never looked at the horrid old creature. And one of those Guardsmen wrote me a note, too.

I returned it unopened—I did, indeed; though nothing could be more gentlemanlike than his manner when he was introduced to me the other night. I wish I was ugly, I do. It's a positive misfortune to be stared at, and followed in the way I am."

"You bring it entirely upon yourself," said Olivia, angrily. "I have no patience with you, Clara. Your aunt is quite right. Look at your dress. You do everything to attract attention, and then you complain. Do you know, if I didn't believe you to be more like a silly child than a woman—a woman actually older than myself—I should give you up. I can't think how you can go on as you do. You put me upon thorns when Mr. Thompson is here."

"He and I are not the least sympathetic, dear, that's it. His is a cold nature: I am too warm and outspoken. I know I say a great many things I oughtn't."

"It isn't only the things you say—you *do* such strange things."

Mrs. Elliston put her pocket-handkerchief to her eyes.

"That horrid man has been prejudicing you against me—I see he has. Oh, Olivia, if you knew all—if you knew all—if you knew what I have to bear, you wouldn't be hard upon me."

She burst into tears—apparently real passionate tears. Olivia was moved to pity, as she always was when the little widow flung herself upon her friend's mercy. And it ended, as such scenes had ended before, in Clara's contrition and promises of amendment; but in her telling Olivia nothing.

"I wish heartily you were not on the stage," said the latter. "Keep to concerts, and give lessons; then you will be out of the way of this silly flattery, which your foolish little head cannot stand, Clara. It lowers and vulgarises any nature to listen to all this stuff."

"I can't help their talking to me. There isn't one of them I care twopence about."

"That is exactly what I complain of. You ought to marry again. You would be much safer and happier. But what honest man would like to marry a woman whom he sees surrounded as you seem to be, and drinking in all this adulation? I think you are capable of a strong attachment; and how much happier you would be away from all this excitement, with one man you loved and respected, in a quiet home, with children——"

Mrs. Elliston started up. Her face was very white: she was not thinking of dramatic effects now.

"Don't go on, Olivia—don't talk about chil-

dren, for God's sake. I can't stand it. There *was* a time when—I thought such a life—such happiness possible for me; but it is all gone—gone! No, my present life is the only one for me—when one has suffered as I have, to drown thought—that is the only thing!"

She sat down again, and buried her head in her hands. She was silent for some minutes, and Olivia said nothing, thinking it better to leave Clara now to herself. By-and-by the latter rose, dried her eyes, and presently stole a look at the glass, to see that she was not greatly disfigured; then she leant over Olivia, in a graceful attitude, and kissed her friend's forehead.

"How good you are to me! I'm afraid I don't deserve it. And yet I went to church twice last Sunday, and read a book of Aunt Crosbie's in the evening, upon 'Justification by Faith.' Do you hold that doctrine, dear? It is certainly much easier than 'good works;' so I think I believe in it."

CHAPTER XX.

HOW THE NEWS WAS RECEIVED IN JAMAICA.

THERE was a visible change in Mr. Marston from about this time. He daily got feebler, and his appetite failed him. He still, when the sun shone, crawled out upon Fritz's arm for a quarter of an hour; but he became more and more reluctant to leave his arm-chair, where he dozed the greater part of the day. His old Spanish friends, De Castro and Montalba, were still out of England. Mr. Claxton called about once a month to ask after the old gentleman's health; but the good merchant's visits were not very enlivening. He always reported well of Rupert, and therein lay the most valuable portion of his discourse. Except Miss Pringle, no one else ever called. The daily visits of the two lodgers, therefore, were really

precious, as tending to rouse and enliven the old man. Mrs. Elliston was like an impudent little robin, twitting and chirruping about him; Mr. Thompson, a mastiff, full of sagacity and strength. He welcomed each after his kind. Mrs. Elliston knelt down beside his chair, and made him laugh by recounting all the misadventures that befell her theatrical companions; how one, having split the most essential portion of his garments, at the moment of appearing on the stage, went through his scene without "changing front," and walked out backwards; how another, remarkable for his absence of mind, when enacting Macbeth, came on clutching a pot of porter, and exclaiming, "Is this a dagger that I see before me?" And then Mr. Marston, being kindled, would recollect stories of the great John Kemble, and Storace, and Madame Catalini, and tell them with much zest; after which exertion he generally slept some hours. By-and-by arrived the mastiff, and aroused him with terrible though friendly growls, telling of savage encounters, brave enterprises, and hairbreadth escapes. With this visit the blind man was always especially delighted; he grew more and more fond of the painter's society, though, true to his character, he never allowed this, and cautiously abstained from any extravagant praise of the individual. Thus:

"How well Mr. Thompson tells a story, father! I know no one who recounts as he does."

"Ah! yes; well enough. A pleasant man, certainly."

"I observe you hear every word he says without difficulty. He has such a charming voice."

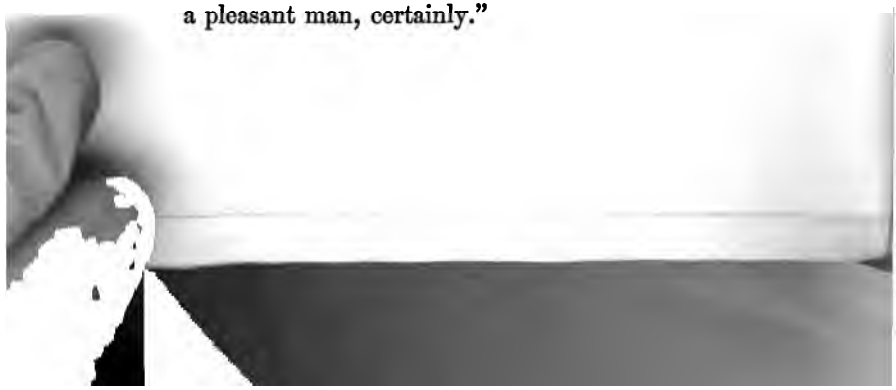
"I hear every word that every one says, if they speak *distinctly*. They needn't scream, like your Aunt Clorinda. You've got into a way of mumbling lately, Olivia, but I *used* to hear you perfectly."

"Yes, father; I must try and correct myself. I am so sorry Mr. Thompson is going into the country, and won't be here again for three or four days."

"Oh! three or four days? A pleasant man, certainly. Humph! Not much of a trade, his painting, I think: unless he is a Sir Thomas Lawrence or a Romney, eh? Where does he live? Leads a wandering sort of life, it seems. That runs away with a deal of money. 'Take care of the pence, and the pounds 'll take care of themselves.'"

"People who are always thinking of the pence are generally great screws, father; and I'm sure no one hates *that*, in reality, more than you do."

"Oh! I don't know. I don't know about that—better than a spendthrift any day; but he's a pleasant man, certainly."



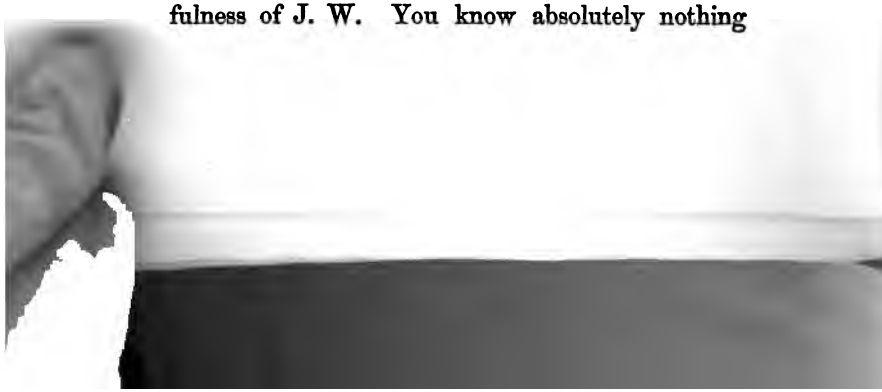
More than this qualified praise he never bestowed; yet Olivia knew perfectly well that, within her recollection, no man had ever crossed their threshold whose society her father enjoyed as much as he did Mr. Thompson's. He had never been of a gregarious turn: he had made few friends, and those few were all of the solid, foul-or-fair-weather kind; capital, honourable men, but in whom conversational delightfulness had no part. The painter formed a great contrast to these; and Mr. Marston would have owned it, if the habits of threescore years and ten had not been too strong for him. But he regarded laudation, or, indeed, enthusiasm in any shape, much as he did embraces, kisses, tears, and emotions of any kind whatsoever — womanish extravagances, unbefitting the caution and decorum of a sensible man.

March came—a bleak and bitter March. Mr. Marston caught cold. He could not shake it off for many weeks, and it still further enfeebled him. And after that he went out no more.

Rupert's letter, in reply to his sister's, wherein she had told him of the clock-robbery, and of the acquaintance they had formed with the painter, reached her about this time. In it he said:

"You know how desirable I think it that you should make no acquaintances in your present position; and I should have especially wished you

to avoid intimacy with lodgers in the same house. Knowing your impulsive nature, I think I ought to have guarded you particularly against this; but the singularly reserved character of the 'first floor' seemed to render any such warning unnecessary; and the third floor was unoccupied when I left. Of course, now it is too late; and I can only be thankful that Mr. Thompson seems such a thorough gentleman, and that his visits amuse my father. Still, you must not feel annoyed if, as your natural protector (especially since I am at a distance), I look jealously at every one who approaches you, and if I say something which appears to you absurdly premature and groundless. But, remembering how completely blinded you were as to the character of a certain person, not many months ago, and that you showed—shall I call it a susceptibility?—then, which *might* have become something stronger, I think it necessary to caution you very decidedly against encouraging any romantic ideas about your 'Christopher Columbus in a shabby coat.' You will either laugh or be very angry, no doubt, as you read this. If you profit by it, however, I shall not care for that. This Thompson may be a very delightful person; I dare say he is: still I can't forget that you and I differed considerably as to the delightfulness of J. W. You know absolutely nothing

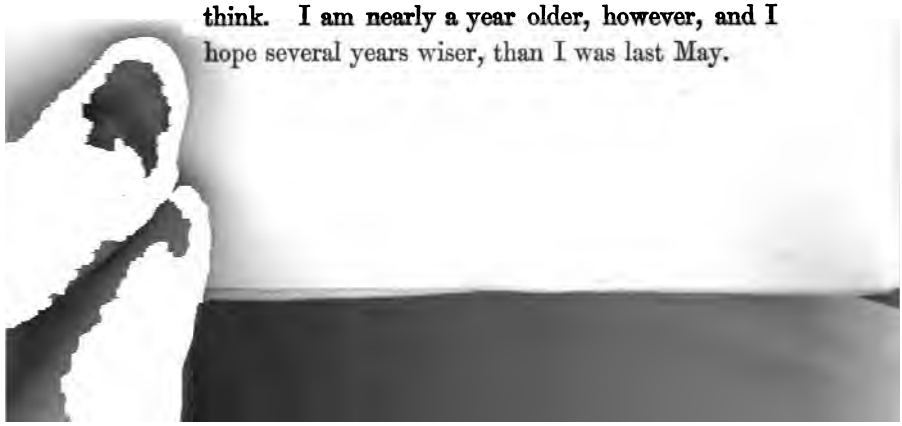


about this painter, and what you tell me you have observed sounds more mysterious than reassuring. For myself, I dislike mysteries. I love things that are above-board; and as I have nothing to conceal myself, I like to know something of the people I live with. Women are different: that cross between sadness and cynicism is always attractive to them; and mystery has a fatal charm. I do not see that Mr. Thompson could have done less than try to recover the clock, when he was in a measure instrumental in the robbery; and because a man is good-natured, and has the trick of talking well, it is no reason why one is to rush into an intimacy with him, without knowing anything of his antecedents. Nothing in the world would make me regret so much having accepted this appointment as to find that during my absence you had been led to fall in love with any one under these conditions. . . . .

"As to the little widow, so sweet and innocent-looking a creature *must* be harmless; and her living with the dragon of respectability you describe makes me easy about your acquaintance with her. I remember her distinctly. I wish I could hear her sing. Here I never get any music, and I thirst exceedingly for some. Our affairs drag on their weary length, and I see no prospect of getting away at present."

Rupert was right: his sister did not laugh, but she was a good deal annoyed, when she read his letter. To her father she omitted the whole of the passage transcribed, and filled it in with some extraordinary details of Jamaica, supplied by her imagination. When she answered her brother, two days afterwards, she dismissed the subject of his warning lightly, in this vein:

"As to Mr. Thompson, he has a dread of women in general (as he shows, by scarcely tolerating pretty little Mrs. Elliston), and a perfect *horror* of marriage, of which he had a sad experience for eighteen years;—so you see how groundless your fears are on my account! He is most kind; and dear father and I may really regard him now in the light of a friend. He is so constantly attentive and good to father, that I feel very grateful to him; but as to me, his manner and his openly announced opinion of married life would be sufficient to prove to you that there is no danger on my account. His society is really very valuable to us, and I should grieve very much if father were deprived of it; but you may be quite sure that Mr. Thompson has not the most distant idea of laying siege to your sister's heart, even if that citadel were as insecurely guarded as you seem to think. I am nearly a year older, however, and I hope several years wiser, than I was last May.



"I wish I could give a better account of our darling. These cold winds try him a good deal; and I am afraid he is decidedly weaker. Walking is such an exertion to him that we have given up urging it. We hope that with warmer weather he will regain his strength."

But the warmer weather came, and though the old man rallied a little, he never went out. The habit, once broken, could not be renewed. With loving eyes the faithful daughter watched him day by day. Before him she was always cheerful. Whatever dread or trouble she had at heart, her voice, at least, never betrayed it.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE REASON WHY MR. THOMPSON PAID TWO MORNING VISITS.

It was now the middle of April. About three weeks after the conversations detailed in the last chapter, Mr. Thompson paid a visit to the Temple one morning. The person he called upon received him with cordiality, but with some surprise.

"What an age it is since I have seen you, my dear fellow! Where have you been hiding? I went to look you up some months ago at the Athenæum; they said you were down in Berkshire, but I was there at Christmas, and heard you were always in London. I suppose there is a lady in the case, eh? A woman is always at the bottom of everything."

"In my case, Heaven forbid! A burnt child dreads the fire. I've suffered enough from a woman. Art is my only mistress now, Hervey. I'm working very hard, and have rooms in a quiet part of the town. I see no one. Frankly, I

shouldn't come and see you now, but that I want you to do something for me."

"After that candid avowal, state your wishes. My time is yours—make your mind easy. This is not a brief; it is a French melodrama, in seven acts, I am translating, for want of better to do; so——"

"That is just it. I know your craze for everything connected with a theatre, of old. I believe you know the birth, parentage, and private history of every actor and actress in London, don't you?"

"Oh! you overrate my acquirements. They are not so deep and varied as you think. Do you know anything of a Mrs. Elliston—a little singer at concerts and suburban theatres?"

"Didn't I say a woman was at the bottom of it? Ha! ha! Mrs. Elliston? Let me see. A pretty little fair woman, isn't she? I have never seen her; but I hear fellows make parties to go off into the wilds and hear her, and come away very much smitten. No, I don't know much about her—but I can find out. What is it you want to know?"

"*Imprimis*, if there is, or ever was, an Elliston: secondly, whether she was divorced from her husband: thirdly, what sort of character she bears."

"Tharpe—you know Tharpe, the man with the cottage near Westbridge?—is the person to answer your second inquiry at once. His chambers are

just over the way—
his special line of
particulars of every
I believe. As to t
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Mr. Thompson seemed to ruminate.

"I must renew my acquaintance with him, some day. We must try and see what can be done for him. Good-bye, Hervey—don't come out. I can find my way."

He descended the old worm-eaten stairs, and crossed to Paper-buildings.

Mr. Tharpe—of whom we shall have to speak more at length hereafter, and will not now stop to describe—was at home.

He, too, elevated his eyebrows in surprise, when Mr. Thompson walked in.

"I was not aware you were in England. It is some years since we met, sir. You have become half a foreigner, I believe, since——"

"I have travelled a good deal, if that is what you mean, since I last saw you, upon a disagreeable matter of business. It is not upon business that I am now come—but to gain a piece of information, if you can supply it."

"Be good enough, then, to put your question in as direct and close a form as you can. My time is valuable; and though I esteem the honour of a visit from you—that is *not* upon business—very highly, still, as these are my working hours, I am compelled to beg you to be succinct."

Mr. Thompson smiled, ever so faintly.

"What I want to know is this. Has there been any divorce case in which the name of Elliston has

figured during your recollection? That, at least, I suppose to have been the husband's name. The wife's maiden name was Raikes. The name of Elliston which she now bears may be only an assumed one."

"Elliston? Let us see. I think about the year 1810——"

"That won't do. The woman isn't four-and-twenty yet."

The barrister referred to some registers, and a volume of memoranda.

"Raikes—there was the great case of Sir Thomas—no, that won't do. Maiden name, Ellis. Ellison? Can that be it?—circumstantial evidence—twelve children—curious point about settlement—maiden name Smithers—no—Ellison—*in flagrante delicto.* Hm! Are you sure of the name? If so, there has been no such case this ten years back."

"I am sure of the name of Raikes—of nothing more."

The barrister looked up with shrewd scrutiny into the other's face.

"If the thing is—is—worth it, we can perhaps——"

"You mean, if I want to marry the lady? I have no such intention. Still, I am willing to give something to learn what I require."

"We entertain pretty much the same ideas upon

matrimony, I suspect," laughed Mr. Tharpe—and his laugh was not agreeable. "*You*, from experience, sir—'extra lutum pedes habes;' *I*, upon principle."

"Or the want of it," murmured his visitor. Then, aloud, "Do not misapprehend me, Mr. Tharpe. I have no intrigue with the lady in question. I have reasons for wishing to learn whether she is an honest woman, as I have reasons, also, for doubting the same."

"There are reasons for doubting every woman," sneered the barrister; "and, for my part, I believe some of the most honest often figure in crim. con. cases. They have sacrificed everything probably to one man. They have had what our neighbours call 'le courage de leurs opinions.' Whereas half the wives go on deceiving their husbands to the end of the chapter."

Mr. Thompson did not vouchsafe to say whether he agreed, or disagreed, with Mr. Tharpe. There was a slight shade of *hauteur* in his manner, as he said that, if Mr. Tharpe could help him in the inquiry he was making, he should feel obliged; and then he asked after his son.

"My son? Oh! He eats about three pounds of meat a day, and drinks his bottle of wine. He is six feet high, and he has a famous digestion. He rides pretty fairly to hounds, and he speaks the truth. There—I don't know that I can tell

[illegible] ...e it to advantage than that ... the University of Oxford, ... so vain and varied. ... Tennis vani- ... in connection to which ... street."

... in health—the two first ... esse or his son—more ... But I will ... Dr. Thorpe. If you hear, ... with any of anything to ... you will let me know. Good ...

... Dr. Thompson to take the ... *A dozen words*—a ... *under a lamp in* ...

... Mr. Thompson, from the ... Mrs. Ellison, conceived a ... Time had done nothing ... this dislike. He was ... of her egotistical gar- ... He was even un- ... to be in our aversions—for ... in the sincerity of her decla- ... Olivia. He believed she ... by a woman who, under an ... was anything but in- ...

But what had Mr. Thompson to do with all this? it will be asked. What business was it of his, if Mrs. Elliston had her little private failings, like other women? Why need he take the ungenerous trouble of dragging them into the light of day? In short, how could it concern him if, in the friendship between two young women, one of them proved unworthy of the confidence placed in her?

This is why. The avowal is premature, inasmuch as he was ignorant of the simple truth himself as yet. With all his mistrust of women, and his horror of matrimony, this recluse was falling in love. He struggled against it; he would not believe it; he laughed the idea to scorn whenever it crossed his mind. Was it possible, after all he had suffered at the hands of a woman, that he should again become subject to a passion which he believed to have burnt out of him years ago? Had he not done with all that, and for ever, when he awoke from that early dream? Had it not become an habitual condition of mind with him to rail against marriage? Why, he would be a fool indeed, now, in his middle age, to begin building up castles anew. Could such a queen among women as this young creature ever care for a worn, battered man, who had had his romance and paid dearly for it, who felt himself embittered and misanthropic, for whom the lees

you anything more to his advantage than that. He does great credit to the University of Oxford, certainly—his acquirements are so vast and varied. You have no children, I think? 'Vanitas vanitatis.' You are spared the humiliation to which we 'proud parents' are subject."

"You prize honesty and health—the two first blessings a man should desire for his son—more lightly than I do," said his visitor. "But I will detain you no longer, Mr. Tharpe. If you hear, as Mr. Joseph Adye would say, of anything to my advantage you will let me know. Good morning."

What was it caused Mr. Thompson to take the unusual step just recorded? *A dozen words—a mere broken sentence, overheard, under a lamp in the Strand.* No more.

It has been seen that Mr. Thompson, from the first moment he saw Mrs. Elliston, conceived a dislike to that little lady. Time had done nothing to lessen, or even mitigate, this dislike. He was impatient of her vanity, of her egotism, of her theatrical *poses*. He—as we are prone to be in such matters—did not believe in the genuineness of affection for [illegible] quite deceived [illegible]

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all amusing to look at, or be
heard
in her vicinity, she was nodding
to
and uncommonly glad to get out.
She
in the crowd, however, impelled hither,
herself, by curiosity, had recognised her; and
person, by dint of pushing and manœuvring
verly, managed to get close to Mrs. Elliston as
she was coming out, and to separate her somewhat

from her elderly companion. She started when he spoke to her, flushed, and then turned white as a sheet: it was clear that she did not recognise the speaker with any pleasure. Still he talked on: the crowd was a long while in getting itself out, and every moment she was separated further and further from Mrs. Crosbie by those whose elbows were more vigorous than that rheumatic lady's.

By one of those coincidences that appear improbable, and are not, perhaps, in reality, so very uncommon, just as the little widow and her companion reached the street, the person of all others in London most curious and interested in watching her movements chanced to be passing, and was himself arrested by the crowd, pouring out in one dense stream.

Mr. Thompson caught sight of her pale excited face, upturned towards the tall good-looking man who bent over her. She was speaking with great volubility, but in so low a voice that, though Thompson found himself pressed by the crowd close to her, he only heard the words, "Death-bed —never after your—spared me the painful—cruel —*sacrificed all for you.*" There was a smile of something like derision upon her companion's face, and though what he said was inaudible, that it was in some sense an accusation might be inferred from Mrs. Elliston's impetuous exclamation, "*It is not true; it is not true!*" What

followed, Thompson could not catc
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looked once or twice anxiously towa
for Mrs. Crosbie; and she kept her
on the pavement, the crowd driftin
Thompson, meantime, leaning with
the wall close by, where, if he co
what she said, he could at least wat
movement. The gaunt scooped fo
Crosbie in her black flaccid robes at
on the steps; in an instant, with a
and gesture, Mrs. Elliston evident
companion leave her, and turned h
him towards her aunt. The man ra
brows, smiled, hesitated for half a
then moved on with the crowd. T
never seen this person before; but
were now firmly engraven on his mi
ever and whenever they might meet
he should recognise him.

This is what gave him food for

speculation all that night; this is what led him to pay Messrs. Hervey and Tharpe visits the next day.

And with what result?

Two days later he received a note from Hervey to the following effect:

"I have made inquiries in various quarters about Mrs. E. You know how ready men are to invent, or *conclude* things about a woman in that position; but I can hear of nothing the least definite against this one. Her husband (for there *was* a bonâ-fide husband, and no divorce) died two or three years ago, and her name has never been coupled before, or since, with any other man's; though she seems to have a host of admirers, and not to *dis*courage them altogether. She is, in fact, I presume, a little woman fond of admiration, like most of her class—but no worse than this. Several fellows have been after her, I hear, and she condescends occasionally to receive their presents; but she is extremely wide awake, and never does anything to compromise herself. Is this satisfactory? Tell me if there is anything more you want to find out."

It was by no means satisfactory to Mr. Thompson; and there was a great deal more he would have learned, if he could; but with this information he was, perforce, obliged to be satisfied for the present.

END OF VOL. I.

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